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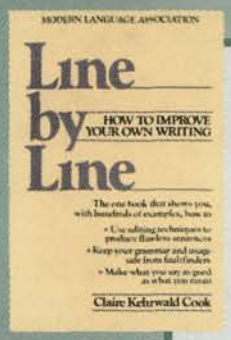

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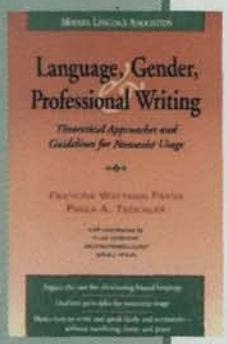

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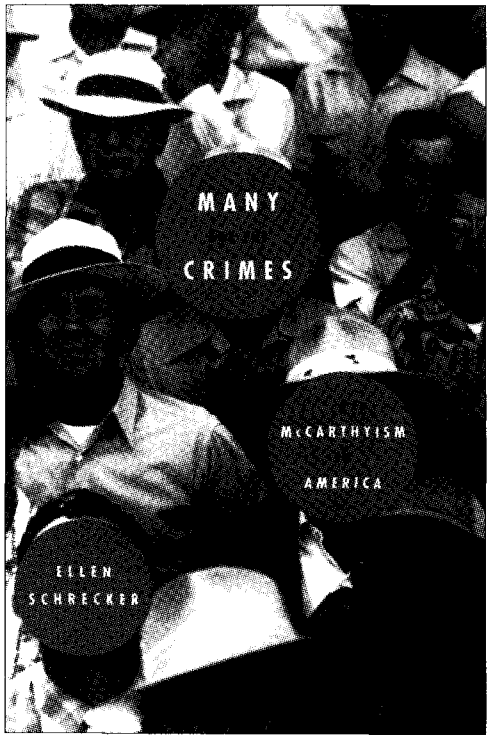

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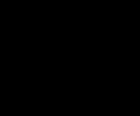

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A SEASONAL BOOK REVIEW FROM THE EDITORS OF LINGUA FRANCA, LAUNCHING THIS SPRING.

THE LINGUA FRANCA

BOOK REVIEW

SPRING 1998

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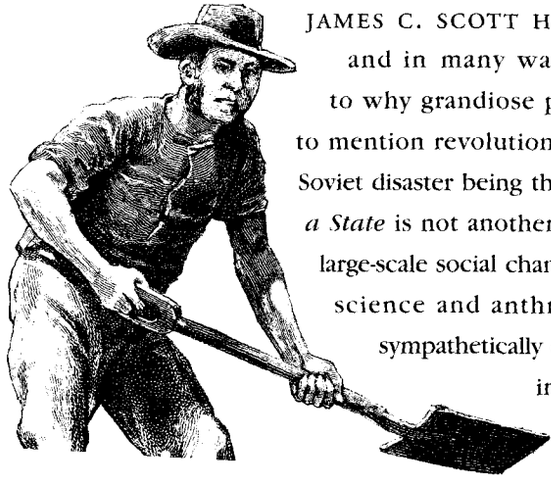
The Best Laid Plans

BY ROBERT HEILBRONER

SEEING LIKE A STATE: HOW CERTAIN SCHEMES TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN CONDITION HAVE FAILED

BY JAMES C. SCOTT • YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS • 445 PP • $35 • MONTH



JAMES C. SCOTT HAS WRITTEN A POWERFUL, and in many ways insightful, explanation as to why grandiose programs of social reform, not to mention revolution, so often end in tragedy—the Soviet disaster being the textbook case. Yet *Seeing Like a State* is not another book preaching opposition to large-scale social change. Scott, a professor of political science and anthropology at Yale, has written sympathetically of peasant resistance movements in Southeast Asia, and he is fully aware that large-scale social change often requires bold

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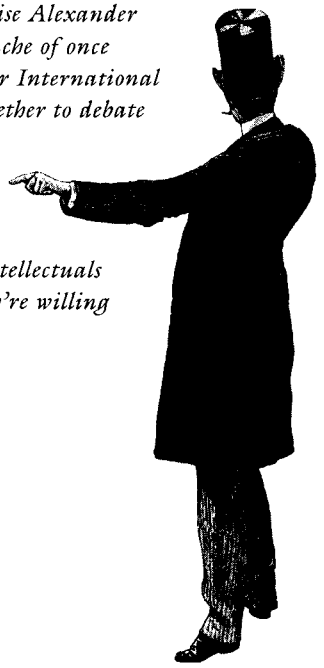

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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CHARGED CLIMATE

My heart went out to Adam Weisberger ["The Man Who Knew Too Much," February], who was damned by the same students who had earlier praised his teaching, denied due process, dissed by colleagues who should have rallied to his defense, and ultimately done out of a tenured position at Colby.

Yet I don't find clear-cut villains in this story. Not the amiable-looking chair of sociology or the handsome dean of faculty. And surely not the complaining students. All were plowing uncertain paths in the Maine snow.

That uncertainty, I'd venture, is not confined to Colby. Rather, it seems that there has been a cultural realignment in America such that, particularly at small, elite colleges and universities, everyone is in a double bind. Woe unto the professor who offends a student in what author Ruth Shalit calls "today's charged climate." Woe unto the administrator who doesn't bend over backward to "protect" the offended student, no matter how frivolous or undocumented the charges. Woe unto the campus community that doesn't rally round the aggrieved student. Yet good students—like those at Colby—demand to be challenged, insist on educational innovation, like theory to be made relevant, and want close relationships with caring faculty like Weisberger, even as some of them fear the consequences of that engagement. Therein lies the problem.

This isn't to say that Weisberger was a saint. Maybe Adam "wanted my stuff," as one student put it. Perhaps cautionary words of advice to Weisberger were in order. But students like those in Weisberger's class who choose to disclose need to be encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. Decades ago, when Freud was the rage on college campuses, students might have been asked not just why the Weisbergers of their classrooms wanted their stuff but why they wanted their professors to want their stuff. That's still a fair question, but it's a difficult one to ask these days. Too bad!

HERBERT W. SIMONS
SCHOOL OF COMMUNICATIONS AND THEATER, TEMPLE UNIVERSITY

Would Socrates, universally considered one of the greatest and most influential teachers in Western history, have been able to get tenure at Colby? He regularly related ideas to life. He took meals with students, even got drunk with them! He was intrusive and nagging and delighted in making students "intellectually and emotionally uncomfortable." He actually called himself a gadfly. He liked to sting people to make them think. On the other hand, no dean has given Weisberger hemlock yet.

WILLIAM M. CALDER
PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

NEW YORK OBSERVER

As an active member of Congregation Beth Simchat Torah for almost its entire history, I was interested to read about the struggles surrounding Moshe Shokeid's ethnographic study ["Return of the Natives," February]. One can understand Shokeid's frustration with the pressures his editorial colleagues brought to bear. But as Emily Nussbaum suggests, perhaps even more significant an influence on the final product were the difficulties Shokeid faced in assuming the role of the disinterested observer in his research. Not only did he develop a rapport with a particular segment of the congregation, but he also had an impact on the synagogue's membership. In his book, *A Gay Synagogue in New York*, Shokeid reports that one woman decided to increase her synagogue participation as a direct result of attending a meeting held to assist him with his work.

As an academic microbiologist, I am acutely aware of the challenges involved in achieving scientific objectivity, even when one's subjects are at a significant phylogenetic distance. Did Shokeid assume a disinterested stance? Perhaps it is more to the point to say that the congregation benefited from the attention and insight of a caring and diligent professional.

REGINA LINDER
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF HEALTH SCIENCES
HUNTER COLLEGE, CUNY

FREE YOUR MIND

The contemporary debate about the "Free Trade Faith" [December/January] would benefit from a larger historical perspective. Present commentators have reduced the rich history of free trade to a narrow story of the evolution of economic theory and of trade policy's material costs and benefits. But from the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the case for free trade also embodied powerful moral, cultural, and social values. "Jesus Christ is Free Trade, and Free Trade is Jesus Christ," one Victorian speaker told a British audience. Free trade was popular (especially in Britain) because, in addition to its perceived material benefits, it was associated with civil society, individual responsibility, and, above all, peace among nations.

Economists did not monopolize the discussion: At the turn of the twentieth century, they had neither the academic status nor the public credibility of their late-twentieth-century successors. Even in Britain, home of the free-trade movement and neoclassical economics, the divided profession was ridiculed in popular discussions of fiscal policy. What is significant to the larger historical picture, then, is that public discussion of free trade has diminished it to little more than a neoclassical economic ideal.

FRANK TRENTMANN
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY
PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

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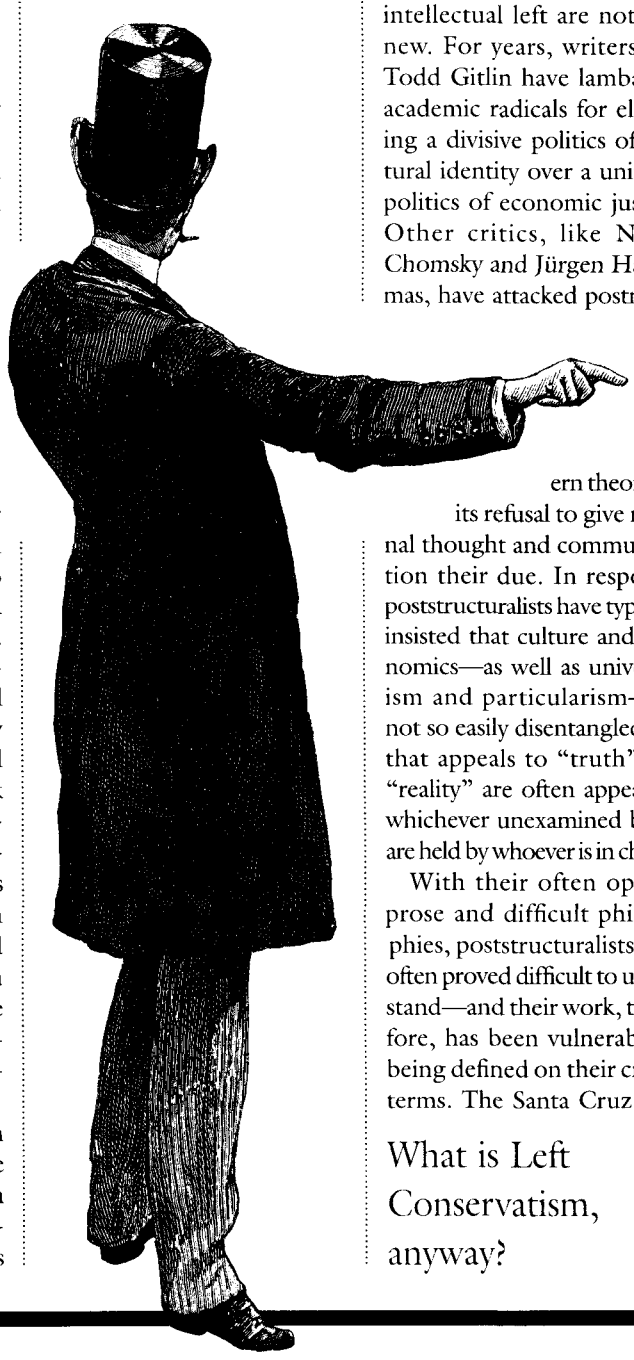
Field *Notes*

J'ACCUSE!

"A SPECTER IS HAUNTING U.S. intellectual life," announced an academic workshop flyer that circulated at the University of California at Santa Cruz this winter. "The specter of Left Conservatism." Drawn by these forbidding words and a growing sense of unease about what they might mean, more than one hundred people gathered in a windowless auditorium on campus in late January for a four-and-a-half-hour workshop featuring Judith Butler, Paul Bové, and other well-known academics associated with various strands of radical post-structuralist thought.

But what was Left Conservatism? Although the flyer failed to define either leftism or conservatism, it seemed to define Left Conservatism as a kind of political betrayal. "Within academia and without, in events such as the Sokal affair, in the anti-theory polemics in *The Nation* and the *Socialist Review,* in work by authors such as Katha Pollit [*sic*], Alan Sokal, and Barbara Ehrenreich, there is evidence of a phenomenon that could properly be labeled Left Conservatism: that is, an attack by 'real' leftists on those portrayed as theory-mongering, hyper-professional, obscurantist pseudo-leftists."

Assessing this phenomenon darkly, the flyer added: "There seems to be at present an attempt at consensus building among Left Conservatives that is founded on notions of the real, and of the appropriate language with which to analyze it. We can see, in the work of some of the writers listed above and in other work, claims for a certain kind of empiricism, for common sense, for linguistic transparency." Finally, the flyer noted, "This attack on anti-foundationalism...often brings Left Conservatism toward an uneasy convergence with anti-relativists on the right."



Of course, quarrels on the intellectual left are nothing new. For years, writers like Todd Gitlin have lambasted academic radicals for elevating a divisive politics of cultural identity over a unifying politics of economic justice. Other critics, like Noam Chomsky and Jürgen Habermas, have attacked postmodern theory for its refusal to give rational thought and communication their due. In response, poststructuralists have typically insisted that culture and economics—as well as universalism and particularism—are not so easily disentangled and that appeals to "truth" and "reality" are often appeals to whichever unexamined biases are held by whoever is in charge.

With their often opaque prose and difficult philosophies, poststructuralists have often proved difficult to understand—and their work, therefore, has been vulnerable to being defined on their critics' terms. The Santa Cruz conference offered a novel opportunity to turn the tables and characterize some of those opponents' views. And what better way to challenge one's fellow leftists than to accuse them of being, well, conservatives?

What is Left Conservatism, anyway?

Or so it seemed. In fact, as the conference proceeded, the new terminology seemed to collapse of its own accord. What happens when skeptics of categorical thinking attempt to invent a category of their own? The result was something like chaos.

Chris Connery, co-director of the UC-Santa Cruz Center for Cultural Studies, which sponsored the workshop, began the day's discussion by backpedaling. He explained that the workshop was meant only as an investigation of the usefulness of the term "Left Conservatism" and that the term was probably most useful in defining "an act, not an identity." By the end of the workshop, Connery had volunteered to dump "Left Conservatism" altogether. He was not alone. By that time, Berkeley professor of rhetoric Judith Butler had regretted that the putative Left Conservatives had not been invited to participate in the workshop and expressed fear that Left Conservatism was a flattening, reductive term. Panelist Joseph Buttigieg, professor of English at Notre Dame, had declared his discomfort with the term "Left Conservatism" and his worry that it would be applied indiscriminately. And after a lengthy presentation critical of Left Conservatives, Santa Cruz's Wendy Brown joked

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during the discussion period that "we are all trying to dissociate ourselves" from the workshop's original premises. By the end of the workshop, only University of Pittsburgh English professor Paul Bové, whom Connery credited with coining the phrase, was still using it. "I really like the term 'Left Conservatism,'" he said, "and I think it should apply to some people whether they like it or not."

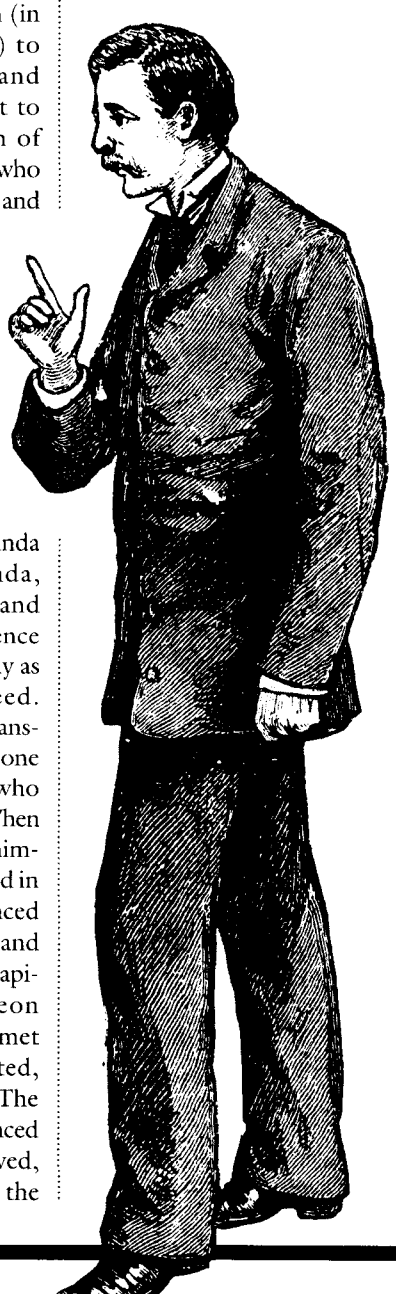
As for the so-called Left Conservatives themselves, they were unanimously aghast at the label—and angry not to have been invited to present their views. Author and journalist Barbara Ehrenreich dubbed the term "a ridiculous oxymoron," insisting she is no conservative. *Nation* columnist Katha Pollitt said she was "very angry and really kind of shocked by [the] flyer" and that any description of her or her views as Left Conservative is "the draining from this nonsensical term of any kind of content." She added: "The only position I have that could possibly be described as Left Conservative is that I don't admire some postmodern Leftists' political pretensions or their prose style."

Although the brand-name Left Conservatives were not there to defend themselves, the workshop did not proceed without protest. In the days before it began, a number of UC-Santa Cruz graduate students had been busy drafting what they called "counter-propaganda." On the day of the workshop, some of these students stood at each auditorium entrance, disbursing

"I think the term Left Conservatism should apply to some people whether they like it or not."

bright red flyers that asked in part, "What does it mean when scholars who claim (in their published works) to embrace 'difference' and radical democracy resort to name-calling as a form of discourse? When scholars who reputedly oppose 'binary' and dualistic thinking feel the need to frame their opponents as a despised 'other' (conservatives)? When anti-essentialists invoke a purely essentialist and fictive category—'left conservatism'—to tar their critics?"

Despite all the propaganda and counter-propaganda, however, the panelists and their critics in the audience may have agreed on nearly as much as they disagreed. ("Who would argue for transparent meaning?" scoffed one of the graduate students who had signed the red flyer.) When a man who introduced himself as an attorney unversed in academic culture announced he believed "in the Real and the True not only with capital letters but with neon lights," he initially was met with chuckles. Undaunted, however, he continued. "The times when I have experienced this," he said, visibly moved, "have been the times of the most intense and immediate political struggle. For example, in the South, at the height of the civil rights movement, when people stand up against police dogs and go to jail. At that moment, it seems to me, there is a vision of something real and something true." His comments were greeted with applause.



Then Judith Butler took the microphone. "'True,' 'untrue,'" she said in her response. "I want to use those words, too. And there are moments of great struggle, moments of extraordinary historical happenings, where I want to say, 'This is real, this is true,' and I *will* say it. And I will not be censored! No one's going to stop me from saying it, and I'm not going to ridicule anybody for saying it."

Was Butler reneging on relativism? Not exactly. Instead, she went on to argue that the struggle for social justice does not need to rely on a quest for certainty. "What I'm most worried about," she said, "is the way in which the truth and the way in which reality get circumscribed prematurely by people who think they know what is and is not *finally* true. Those are powerful terms, and if people think...they know in advance what will qualify as true...or as real, those people scare me more than anything." She concluded: "For political reasons, it's extremely important to use those terms and not to know what their future and final form will take."

Of course, there's no telling what the final form of the term "Left Conservatism" will be. But by the end of the day, the poststructuralists had largely retreated from their newly coined term; their critics had angrily pointed a few fingers of their own; and the rifts among the assembled leftists were no narrower, and no wider, than they had been before the workshop began.

KRISTINA ZARLENGO

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HAIRMENEUTICS

SINCE JANUARY, WHEN THE *Washington Post* persuaded him to untangle the significance of Paula Jones's sleek hair makeover, West Virginia University associate professor Steven Zdatny has reigned as this country's most quoted expert on "the aesthetics and politics of hair." It is a position he has assumed with some hesitation. "By design I'm a social historian of France," he explains. "I'm only a hair scholar by accident."

Accident or no accident, Zdatny seems to be adjusting to his new role. "What matters with hair is *context*," he observes. "For example, Paula Jones's hairstyle tells us less about Paula Jones than about the general social category in which that hairstyle places her." He adds, "What makes it interesting to me is that her hair was redesigned in an obvious attempt to ratchet up her class image." Not surprisingly, this sort of sound-bite semiology has also interested radio-show hosts, newspaper reporters, television producers, and ad copy writers who crave credentialed hair exegesis.

Zdatny's detour into mop psychology grew out of research for a book on the French lower-middle classes, *The Politics of Survival: Artisans in Twentieth-Century France* (Oxford, 1990). While charting occupational shifts after World War I, he noticed a startling rise in the growth of the hairdressing profession. "There was an explosion in consumer demand among women for the services of hairdressers, and parallel to this was the phenomenon of the bob—the short haircut," Zdatny says. Was the bob an expression of women's desire for emancipation? "If you were to do a semiological study of short hair—and I don't know of any—that would be a likely conclusion," he reflects. "There really isn't that much on hair. To tell you the truth, it's a one-man field."

Yes and no. While Zdatny may have few rivals in the study of early twentieth-century hairstyle trends, the hair question has hardly been brushed aside by academia. Not long ago, Stanford offered an entire course on hair; moreover, the subject of black and Asian hair lately has emerged as a popular theme for cultural studies essays. "The body is becoming a huge academic topic, and, by extension, hair has achieved an academic credibility that it didn't have ten years ago," says Valerie Steele of New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology. Steele, who edits a journal called *Fashion Theory*, devoted the entire December issue to hair. "In the simplest terms, it's a result of Foucault," she says. "He made the whole idea of the body and its pleasures and sexuality into something scholars could regard as theoretically central."

> Meet the country's leading expert on the aesthetics and politics of hair.

Zdatny made an appearance in the *Fashion Theory* issue with an article called "The Boyish Look and the Liberated Woman." In the piece, he writes that, although foes of the beauty myth detect malicious method behind "those who manipulate signs" to guide feminine fashions, "what looks like repression in logic can feel like liberation in life." And so, he argues, when high-toned *Parisiennes* rolled their chin-length tresses into clamps for a 500-franc permanent, that was a small price to pay for freedom from decades of headache-inducing chignons. In an even more radical bob-related development, working girls could achieve a posh look with much less cost and effort than old styles demanded. Which leads us back to Paula Jones.

What can the liberation-through-haircut of women at the beginning of the century reveal about Paula Jones at the end of it? "Did Paula Jones feel more in control of her life a few years ago, or now?" Zdatny asks pointedly. "What do you think?" Paula Jones's new hairdo may require high maintenance, but surely it feels more like freedom to her than her old Wash-'n'-Go perm ever did. Just as pre-war Frenchwomen knew that even in an emancipated age they had to suffer to be beautiful, American women now know they must suffer to be politically powerful. "Hairstyles are about suffering," Zdatny says. "So much of women's fashion is."

The busy Zdatny is currently assembling a collection of the class-conscious columns written by the great Parisian hairdresser Émile Long, which were published in Britain's *Hairdressers Weekly Journal Supplement* between 1910 and

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says, describe the "burden that fashionable women of his time had to bear—eight changes of clothes just for a day at the seaside!" Meanwhile, the contemporary fascination with the politics of hair shows no signs of receding, especially since Paula Jones's sleek redo has been supplanted in the public consciousness by Monica Lewinsky's muscular That Girl flip.

Zdatny would rather expatiate on towering ancien-régime wigs, but, gamely, he surrenders a quick impression of the Lewinsky hair message. "She looks like she belongs to Brentwood," he ventures. "You would pick out Monica as someone whose hair has been well taken care of for many years, someone who doesn't fry it, who doesn't tease it—and whose position in the class structure is precisely testified to by her hair."

Only one question remains: How is the hair man himself coiffed? Dreadlocks? Muttonchop whiskers? Mousse? Given his acute eye for hirsute hermeneutics, it is only prudent that Professor Zdatny's own hairstyle is markedly unmarked, immune from irresponsible lay interpretation. "My hair is about as plain as it could possibly be," he says. "I'm a very conventional fellow. I'm clean shaven." He pauses. "Now, do I lack a beard and mustache because I identify with people who are clean shaven, or because when Roberto Durán was beaten by Sugar Ray Leonard, he grew a beard, so I associate it with failure? You tell me."

LIESL SCHILLINGER

THE TUTOR MONARCHY

"EDUCATION HAPPENS, AS IT did in Plato's *Republic*," declared a British politician last November, "whenever two or three people are gathered together with a glass of wine or a cup of coffee or whatever other liquid seems congruous." The speaker—a Liberal peer in the House of Lords—was making a heartfelt defense of an endangered publicly funded activity: the centuries-old tutorial system at Oxford and Cambridge.

For years, the British government has quietly given its two toniest institutions millions of pounds to underwrite their revered tradition of individualized learning. But now, with a budget-conscious Labour administration hell-bent on education reform, this fabled rite of passage of Britain's ruling class appears to many critics to be as pricey—and passé—as the Windsor monarchy.

When the Blair government decided to get tough on university financing last November, Oxbridge's £35 million annual subsidy was immediately earmarked for the guillotine. (Only six members of Blair's cabinet have Oxbridge credentials—the fewest ever.) More important, given Tony Blair's grander reform efforts (modest tuition fees will be implemented at all state-funded institutions beginning next fall), continued taxpayer support of Oxbridge's posh lifestyle seemed particularly hard to justify. A government report released last summer strongly questioned this largesse, asking if Oxbridge's "exceptionally high level of funding" represented the best division of available resources.

Under the current system, the government fully subsidizes the tuition fees levied by Oxbridge's individual colleges. These colleges, where tutorials and the greater part of academic life are conducted, range in size from fewer than 150 students to more than a thousand and are essentially sovereign states. Each has its own royal charter, bylaws, faculty, administrative staff, admissions office, and—most crucially—finances. Some schools, like Oxford's St. John's College (Blair's alma mater) and Trinity College, Cambridge, represent the last vestiges of Britain's preindustrial landed aristocracy; endowed centuries ago with large tracts of real estate, they now rank among the leading corporations in Britain today.

Only six members of Blair's cabinet have Oxbridge credentials—the fewest ever.

Newer additions to the Oxbridge landscape, however, such as Cambridge's Robinson College, have only the land their buildings sit on and much less disposable capital. In 1995–1996, for example, the income of obscure Linacre College, Oxford, amounted to a paltry 1.1 percent of Trinity's intake—barely enough to pay Linacre's doormen.

Part of the rationale for state support is that it makes up for such extreme imbalances. Under this system, all colleges receive a subsidy of £2,700 per student, which they are free to spend as they see fit. Since the universities guarantee individual teaching to all

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students (whereas other amenities, such as gardens and wine cellars, vary greatly among the colleges), the taxpayer connection to the expensive tutorial system is fairly direct. The government subsidy, Cambridge claimed in an official statement last fall, "pays for the college system. It covers the cost of the supervisions [and] the personal teaching...recognized as one of the key strengths of Cambridge."

But educational reformers are less concerned with the distribution of wealth within Oxbridge than with the distribution of educational opportunities in the country at large. As the funding debate reached the boiling point last November, advocates of the cuts assailed the current policy—to use the words of one former Oxonian—as academically "indefensible," and charged that it supported a much-abused system of "casual tutorials and ill-attended lectures." Others, like prominent educator Sir Christopher Ball, criticized the funding on financial and social grounds, calling it "a disproportionate investment in a small number of already privileged people." Indeed, why should Oxford undergrads get personal tutorials for the same price that students at any of the modern Redbrick universities pay for large lectures?

Without government funding, warned the dons, there will be no Oxbridge.

By the second week of November, Oxbridge had responded with an unprecedented and decidedly out-of-character P.R. blitz involving dozens of normally aloof administrators. ("Blair has never known lobbying like it," reported the London *Times* as the House of Lords geared up to debate the issue.) Without government funding, warned the dons, there will be no Oxbridge. According to this line of argument, any reform will drastically compromise not only the quality and character of university teaching but, more seriously, the institutions' research ratings. Traditionalists insist that Oxbridge's college-based structure—in which faculty reside among students and visiting scholars—fosters the kind of small academic community that has been all but lost at its centrally managed American counterparts.

Calling the system "extraordinarily efficient," Lord Beloff of All Souls, Oxford, noted that "we seem to be able to do on less what Harvard, Yale, or Princeton do so admirably for more." In abolishing this "medieval guild of intellect," as one Cambridge administrator described it, Oxbridge would lose the one advantage it has over its deeper-pocketed transatlantic rivals. (For all the hype, the collective endowments of the universities pale by American standards.)

As to accusations of elitism, the traditionalists blame the problem on secondary education: State high schools simply do not prepare enough qualified candidates for Oxbridge-level education. Getting in *is* a privilege, but a meritocratic one; the uni-

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versities' graduates routinely prove themselves to be Britain's best and brightest in whatever careers they choose. The state should underwrite Oxbridge, its defenders argue, because it is a reliable benchmark of national prestige, much like France's *grandes écoles.*

So when might the New Labour administration be nixing the tutorial grant? Claret-drinking dons need not panic—yet. In February, the question of cutting Oxbridge's subsidy was tabled for one year, though the Higher Education Funding Council stressed that the reprieve was just temporary.

Meanwhile, even die-hard defenders of the status quo admit that at least some future cuts are likely. Already, Oxford and Cambridge are contemplating the prospect of financial centralization and have begun programs to prepare for a privatized future. Both universities have set up development offices largely for the purpose of initiating aggressive American-style fund-raising, and Oxford has recruited a new vice-chancellor with substantial academic managerial experience in the United States.

On the consumer front, meanwhile, efforts are fast being made to put an Oxbridge spin on a lucrative American strategy: licensed products. Oxford has already launched its own line of whiskey on the Japanese market, while Cambridge plans to start selling a university-label bicycle later this year. Rather than changing its antiquated image, Oxbridge may survive by selling it.

HUGH EAKIN

KEEPING THEIR RELIGION

NARJES MISHERGHI TAKES the same courses as other first-year students at Stanford University. But she doesn't live in the university's co-ed freshman dorms. Nor does she often eat dinner with her classmates in the freshman dining hall. Because Misherghi wears a *hijab,* or traditional Muslim dress and head covering, whenever she is in the company of men who are not her relatives, she successfully petitioned Stanford to exempt her from its first-year housing requirement. "It would have been very inconvenient for me to have had to put on the *hijab* to go down the hall to the bathroom or into the lounge to eat," says Misherghi, for whom wearing traditional dress is a religious obligation. "That wasn't how I wanted to live twenty-four hours a day."

As devout Christian, Jewish, and Muslim students enter mainstream campuses in growing numbers, colleges are going out of their way to make them happy. The

When a Muslim student at Colby College in Maine asked for a prayer room, he got it.

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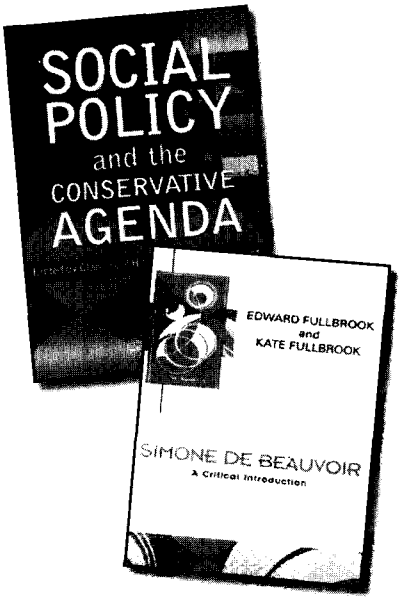
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University of Massachusetts, for example, gives Orthodox Jewish students lower-floor rooms so that they can observe Sabbath rules that preclude the use of elevators. When a Muslim student at Colby College in Maine asked for a prayer room, he got it.

Do these compromises come with a price? By accommodating students' demands for special treatment, universities may be honoring worthy religious principles. But do they risk pandering to religious intolerance as well? Misherghi's special dispensation stands in stark contrast to the story of the much-chronicled Yale Four, a group of Orthodox Jewish freshmen and sophomores whose demands to live off campus were denied by Yale administrators. Robert Gregg, Stanford's dean for religious life, who helped Misherghi win her dispensation, does not think his university should let all observant students set the terms of their admission. Nevertheless, he insists, when students like Misherghi strive to take part in campus life while living according to their faith, they can't be the only ones asked to bend. "If you want to come here, you have to be willing to entertain a wider vision of what you love," he says. "But the university should not ask students to divorce their thinking from their life convictions. It's a hard bargain."

> Yale accommodated an Orthodox Jewish student's request to have the lights in his room changed from sensor to switch control.

By refusing to let a handful of Orthodox Jewish students live off campus, however, Yale stakes a different sort of claim. Students have the same responsibility—and opportunity—to learn from one another in dorm rooms as they do in classrooms, administrators say. "When graduates come back and tell us what they got out of Yale, they talk about meeting people whom they had never known the likes of," says Richard Brodhead, dean of Yale College. "We do not want to diminish those opportunities by allowing groups of students to separate themselves."

In fact, Yale did make the Orthodox students an offer: rooms in freshman suites with bathrooms, on single-sex floors. But the university rejected their demand that roommates agree not to have guests of the opposite sex over to spend the night. The Orthodox students sued, claiming religious discrimination and breach of contract. While waiting for a court decision (at press time, judge had yet to rule on Yale's attempt to get the case dismissed), they have paid $7,000-a-semester dorm bills but lived at home or in rented apartments.

In the meantime, other observant Jewish students quietly moved onto the Yale campus, as they do every year. Saul Nadata, an eighteen-year-old Orthodox freshman, happens to live in the suite to which one of the protesters was originally assigned. Nadata, also, asked for special

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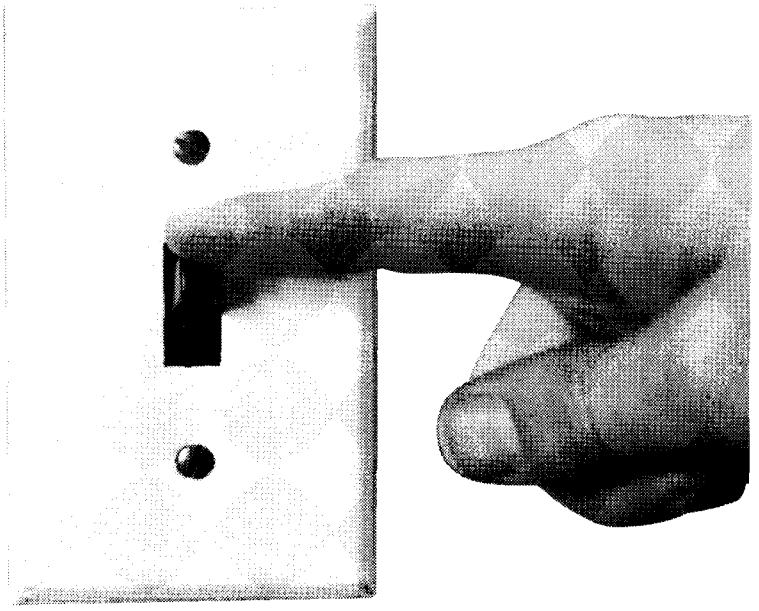
accommodation: He got the lights in his room changed from sensor to switch control so they would not turn on and off during the Jewish Sabbath. But he does not think that Jewish law prevents him from living with roommates that include a Korean-born Londoner who plans to be a Christian missionary. "I would never make a religious compromise," Nadata says. "But that doesn't mean my roommates and I can't work things out. It didn't strike me as a problem that I would be living in a single-sex suite, and I was right—it hasn't been."

For the devout, the difficulty lies in giving definitive answers to questions about religious law. Is living in a co-ed dorm a violation of the Jewish modesty code or of the biblical proscription against living with sinners? Most Orthodox Jews say no. Yet some vehemently answer yes. Differences in tradition and interpretation hold true for other faiths as well. Such disputes make it even trickier for universities trying to arbitrate between acceptable and unacceptable student requests.

Despite a general desire to accommodate believers, schools are unlikely to find a laissez-faire approach completely to their liking. Even Stanford's Robert Gregg has had to get tough on religious groups. Last spring, he threw a leader of a Christian ministry off campus after he infiltrated the college's gay community without disclosing his identity. (After being suspended for the rest of the semester, the student returned to campus last fall). The university's brochure on religious life now carries a warning:



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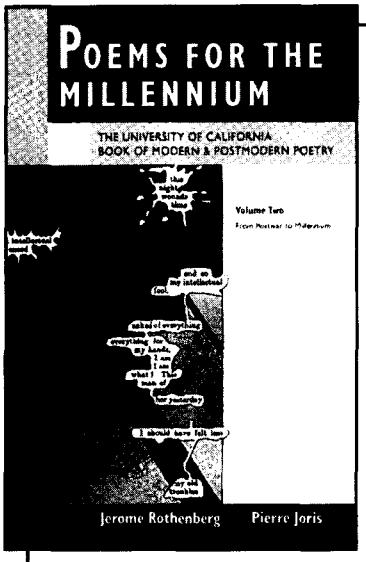
Beware of any group that could pose a threat to intellectual honesty. "Proselytizing is a problem," Gregg says. "I police thirty-one different campus religious groups, and at the beginning of the semester I ask each leader to explain how his or her chief activities are consonant with the purposes of a major research university. If they can't give me a good answer, if the only truth they can see is in their interpretation of the Gospel, then they don't belong here."

EMILY BAZELON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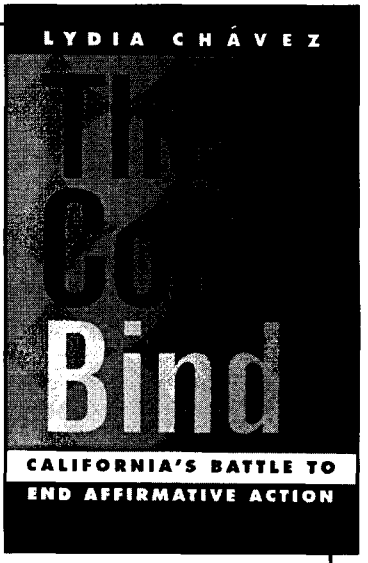

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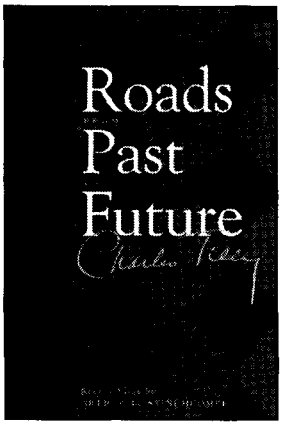

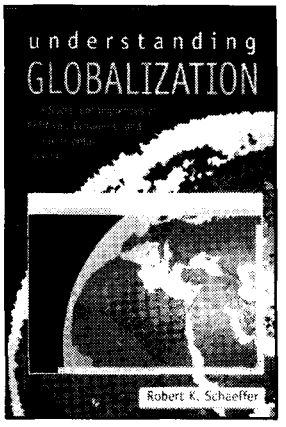

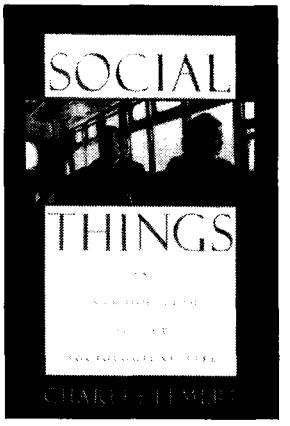

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James Hudnut-Beumler, dean of faculty and associate professor of religion and culture at Columbia Theological Seminary and author of *Looking for God in the Suburbs: The Religion of the American Dream and Its Critics, 1945–1965* (Rutgers, 1994).

"The suburbs are a petri dish for American culture," says Hudnut-Beumler. "Things quickly develop there whose significance is only later more generally apparent. Consider **Robert S. Ellwood**'s *The Fifties' Spiritual Marketplace: American Religion in a Decade of Conflict* (Rutgers, 1997). Leaving the cities opened a range of new religious options to postwar suburban migrants. Ellwood shows that, though suburbanites made choices that looked neo-traditional, what was most remarkable was that they were choices and not inherited affiliations." Hudnut-Beumler also recommends **Virginia Scott Jenkins**'s *The Lawn: A History of an American Obsession* (Smithsonian, 1994). "If the suburbs mirror contemporary middle-class values, then suburbia's lawns are the leading indicators of the desire to subdue nature and structure it by any available chemical or mechanical means. Jenkins herself dislikes lawns, but she interprets their history and significance exceedingly well."

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Philip Langdon, associate editor of *The American Enterprise* and author of *A Better Place to Live: Reshaping the American Suburb* (Massachusetts, 1994).

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described as 'sixty suburbs in search of a city,' has long been a prime example of the sprawling shape that the automobile-dependent American metropolis takes as it expands. ***The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century***, edited by **Allen J. Scott** and **Edward W. Soja** (California, 1996), is a magnificent examination of that region and its growing complexity. Fifteen writers, hailing mostly from architecture, urban planning, geography, and sociology, supply impressively detailed studies of L.A.'s developing character. Especially interesting are Mike Davis's essay on the destruction of L.A.'s agricultural and natural landscape and Martin Wach's skeptical look at attempts to reform the transportation system. This book demonstrates how hard it is to achieve beauty, physical order, and social justice in the contemporary American metropolis."

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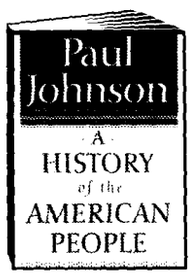
A History of the American People

by Paul Johnson



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(Anchor, 1991) is still the best book about the porous border between the suburbs and the city. Many have discussed Garreau's attention to how downtown-style developments—plate-glass office towers and hotels—have sprouted in suburban rings over the past three decades. But relatively unnoticed is his equally valuable examination of the various ways in which real downtowns have stolen ideas from suburban malls and urban and suburban residential neighborhoods have borrowed from each other. **Gerald Frug**'s ***Local Government Law*** (West, 1988) is an encyclopedic survey of the legal, moral, and political construction of municipalities over the last century. Whereas Garreau, who imagines how edge cities might end up like twenty-first century Venices, makes us wonder what the future might hold, Frug, who imagines how municipalities might have acquired the powers of private corporations, makes us wonder how the past might otherwise have been."

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Michael H. Ebner, professor of history at Lake Forest College and author of *Creating Chicago's North Shore: A Suburban History* (Chicago, 1988).

"**Jon C. Teaford**'s ***Post-Suburbia: Government and Politics in the Edge Cities*** (Johns Hopkins, 1997) surveys booming suburban counties in the outer reaches of metropolitan areas, such as Nassau County, Long Island, and Orange County, California. One of Teaford's many revelations is that such suburban growth traces its origins not to the 1950s but to the 1920s. At that time, politicians modernized county government structures to contend with drastic demographic and economic changes. Teaford appreciates what suburban residents desired from their politics—'small-scale city life'—and what they repudiated—'the by-products of the big city.' Occasionally, a suburban polity cultivated links to the city, but more often, suburbs became cells in which people furtively escaped the vicissitudes of metropolitan life."

• • • •

Mary Gail Snyder, instructor in the urban studies program at San Francisco State University and co-author of *Fortress America: Gated Communities in the United States* (Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

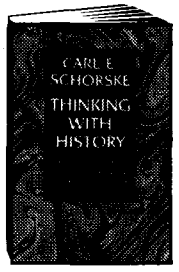
Snyder recommends **Evan McKenzie**'s ***Privatopia: Homeowner Associations and the Rise of Residential Private Government*** (Yale, 1996). "Homeowner associations have quickly become the dominant form of suburban development nearly everywhere in the nation, creating a layer of tiny pseudo-governments that are further fragmenting our metropolitan areas. Proponents speak of community, self-determination, and local democracy, but McKenzie argues that these private governments are actually corporations, created to maximize and protect property values. Thus, they impede the democratic governance of neighborhoods. *Privatopia* is a comprehensive discussion of the issues surrounding homeowner associations, including their historical roots, the link between the suburban ideal and exclusion, and the consequences of privatization for planning, city-suburb relationships, and local and national politics."

JOHN PALATTELLA

Thinking With History

Explorations in the Passage to Modernism

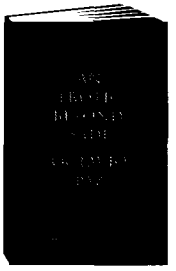
by Carl E. Schorske



This series of essays by the author of the Pulitzer-winning *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* reveal how history's place differs radically between this century and the last. Schorske argues that most twentieth-century European and American artistic and intellectual fields now do their thinking without history–detaching from it in a new autonomous cultural space. *(Princeton Univ. Press) hardcover, 20% discounted price: $19.96**

An Erotic Beyond: Sade

by Octavio Paz



In an earlier poem and two subsequent essays written over a span of five decades, Octavio Paz pierces through the narrow image of Sade as a pornographer and examines his work in the context of the paradox of human freedom and civilized man. He insists that Sade is worth reading, that "the danger lies not in books but in the passions of his readers." *(Harcourt) hardcover, 20% discounted price: $14.40**

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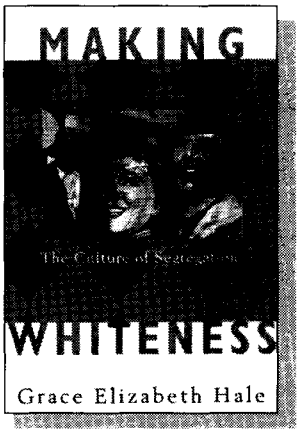

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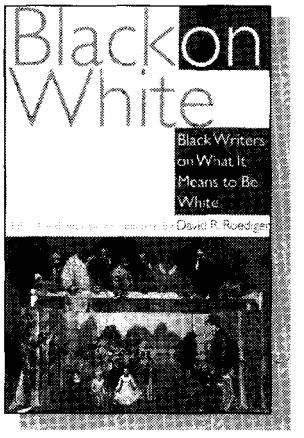

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Inside*Publishing*

NO WORD UNSPOKEN

MIDWAY THROUGH THE *CONFESSIONS*, St. Augustine recalls how he used to marvel at the way Ambrose, the bishop of Milan, read his manuscripts: "His eyes traveled across the pages and his heart searched out the meaning, but his voice and tongue stayed still." Scholars have sparred for decades over whether Augustine's offhand observation reveals something momentous: namely, that silent reading—that seemingly mundane act you're engaged in right now—was, in the Dark Ages, a genuine novelty. Evidence abounds that ancient and medieval readers relished giving voice to their favorite texts in order to appreciate more fully the cadences of Homer and Lucian. Of course, we equally enjoy reading poetry aloud. The question is: Could the earliest readers literally not shut up?

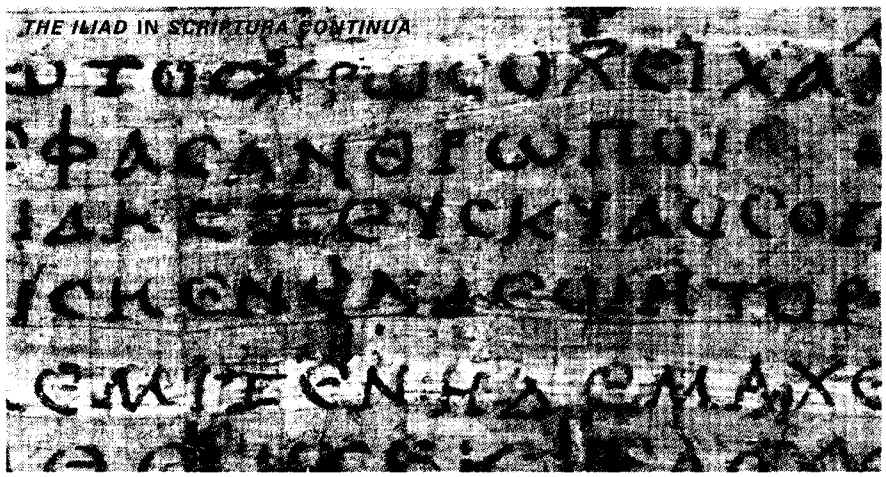
Paul Saenger thinks so—but his argument for the onetime dominance of the spoken word doesn't rest on Augustine. Saenger, a medieval-manuscript expert and a curator of rare books at Chicago's Newberry Library, believes that reading aloud wasn't a mere preference for the ancients, but a practical necessity. His explanation is simple: Ancientandmedievalmanuscriptslookedlikethis anditwaseasiertoreadthemaloud. In his provocative new book, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading* (Stanford), Saenger argues that the practice of transcribing Greek and Latin manuscripts without spaces, or in *scriptura continua*, made reading silently a mind-bogglingly difficult task. "It wasn't literally *impossible* to read silently," Saenger says, "but the notation system was so awkward that the vast majority of readers would have needed to sound out the syllables, if only in a muffled voice." Saenger's book asserts that only at the end of the seventh century, when Irish monks introduced regular word separation into medieval manuscripts, did swift, silent reading become feasible.

Why is it so hard to read text without spacing? Just imagine how difficult it would be for your computer's spell checker if you wrote a document in *scriptura continua*. The program would initially have to determine which syllables to slice into words, and *then* proceed with its main task. The human brain, fortunately, is more dexterous than a word processor, but the burden of breaking strings of letters into words is, nonetheless, a laborious first step. And therein lies Saenger's thesis: "There is a correlation between a propensity to read orally in both past and contemporary cultures and the duration of cognitive activity needed to achieve lexical access in that culture's script."

Saenger, who has a Ph.D. in medieval history, backs up his claims with cutting-edge scientific research. (To his delight, he discovered that psychologists had been testing adult abilities to read English versions of *scriptura continua* for decades, "without being aware of its real-world precursor.") Clinical tests reveal that the brain processes the reading of spaced text—in which words are essentially digested whole—differently from the syllable-by-syllable decoding of continuous script. In fact, different parts of the brain handle these two tasks: Studies of brain-injured Japanese patients demonstrate that, depending on the site of a cerebral lesion, a person may lose the faculty for reading *kanji* ideographs, but not Japanese phonetic script, which lacks regular word separation—and vice versa. The implication is that, even if early medieval readers of *scriptura continua* somehow managed to keep their mouths shut, they were performing a mental task fundamentally different from that of contemporary readers.

> Could the earliest readers literally not shut up?

To modern eyes, the benefits of word spacing seem obvious. What took so long, then? Actually,



THE ILIAD IN SCRIPTURA CONTINUA

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word spaces can be found in ancient Hebrew manuscripts, as well as in a few of the very earliest Greek papyri. But Saenger doubts those word spaces engendered fluid silent reading at the time. After all, he notes, these manuscripts were all written without vowels, making the use of word spaces a virtual necessity for *any* kind of deciphering. In any case, following the Greeks' swift incorporation of Phoenician vowels in the ninth century B.C., scribes began crushing all the words together and writing in *scriptura continua*. Indeed, the entire Greek literary canon, from *The Iliad* onward, was written down this way.

Why? Were the scribes trying to save paper? Saenger offers an explanation for this baffling step backward. "The ancient world did not possess the desire, characteristic of the modern age, to make reading easier and swifter," he writes. "Those who read...were not interested in the swift intrusive consultation of books." The canon was small, and prized texts were typically memorized. Who cared, then, if it was hard to slog through a manuscript the first dozen times? And let's not forget the inherent elitism of Greek and Roman readers. "The notion that the greater portion of the population should be autonomous and self-motivated readers was entirely foreign to the elitist literate mentality of the ancient world," Saenger writes.

By the twelfth century, murmuring monks had become a relic of the past.

Fortunately, this situation didn't last forever. While an ambiguous text format "enhanced the mystery and power of clerics," Saenger notes, such awkwardness served no purpose in a scholarly universe in which readers began "to grapple with highly technical concepts" of science, law, and theology. Starting in the fifth century, scribes began to speckle manuscripts with spaces. As Saenger writes, "The introduction of word separation reflected a mentality in which reading was primarily a visual process for which the stylistic virtue of mellifluous sound was subordinate to rapid access to meaning." Most classicists have decried sporadic spacing as a sign that medieval monks didn't fully understand what they were transcribing. But Saenger sees it as a "great leap forward. It allowed the brain to find its bearings." He's even coined a new term, "aeration," to describe such manuscripts.

Having spent the past fifteen years combing medieval manuscript libraries on both sides of the Atlantic, Saenger identifies the first properly spaced Latin manuscript as the Irish *Book of Mulling*, an illuminated translation of the Gospels dating from around 690 A.D. Indeed, he notes, the Irish soon adopted the the verb *videre*, "to see," as a way to describe reading. In a similar spirit, an Irish monk compared the activity of reading to a cat silently stalking a mouse.

Why Ireland? For one thing, Irish monasteries were home to a select collection of Syriac-language biblical texts from late antiquity, all of which featured word spacing (but no vowels). Moreover, the Celtic-speaking monks approached Latin as a foreign language, and word separation greatly aided readers struggling with the vocabulary. (The French, in contrast, didn't think of their vernacular language as particularly different from Latin.) In the end, muses Saenger, "people at the frontiers have always been more open to linguistic innovation and combining things in new ways."

Over the next couple of centuries, this Irish innovation spread to other countries—first to England, then to the Low Countries and the rest of Europe. By the twelfth century, reports Saenger, murmuring monks had become a relic of the past. (There's no precise date available, alas, for the first appearance of a SILENCE, PLEASE! sign.) As reading became a silent activity, new types of manuscripts that took advantage of this intimacy were produced, from pocket prayer books to erotica. More important, the intellectual orthodoxy enforced by group readings of manuscripts melted away as scholars retired to private rooms for quiet study.

Saenger's book is sure to meet some strong resistance. Many simply refuse to believe that the ancients didn't learn to read *scriptura continua* silently. In a classic 1968 article, "Silent Reading in Antiquity," Bernard Knox wondered sarcastically, "Are we really to imagine that Aristarchus read aloud all the manuscripts of Homer he used for his edition?" Last year, Russian classicist A.K. Gavrilov dug in his heels, insisting in *Classical Quarterly* that "the phenomenon of reading itself is fundamentally the same in modern and in ancient culture."

Why are some scholars so opposed to the idea that *scriptura continua* would impose limits on the ancients' reading abilities? "It's funny," laughs Saenger. "Mathematicians have no problem seeing the importance of notation. Newton's contribution in the *Principia* was both intellectual and notational, with all its symbolic innovations. But classicists refuse to accept that reading has anything to do with the page it's printed on." Of course, classicists aren't the types eager to jump on the interdisciplinary bandwagon. "These folks tend to be tremendously conservative by orientation," Saenger muses. "They tend to be frightened by modern things like psychological research. At one conference, after I laid out my ideas, some classicists called me a Freudian."

DANIEL ZALEWSKI

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BEING THERE

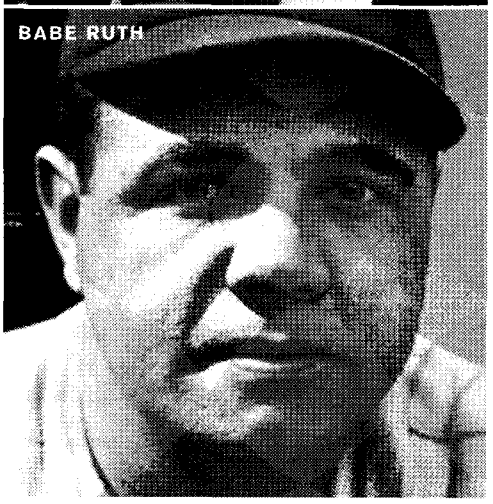
"DO NOT TRY 'TO START FROM THE BEGINNING,' for this book has no beginning," cautions Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht in the "User's Manual" to *In 1926* (Harvard), his panoramic history of that remarkably unremarkable year. In case you're wondering, the book also lacks an end. What it offers instead is an obsessively cross-referenced selection of entries about the world of 1926, from "Airplanes" to "Hunger Artists," from "Movie Palaces" to "Telephones." As for choosing an order, you're on your own. "Read as far as your interest carries you (and as long as your schedule allows)," Gumbrecht advises. "Establish your individual reading path." Interactive reading is, of course, a venerable postmodern conceit: Consider Julio Cortázar's experimental novel *Hopscotch*, not to mention those *Choose Your Own Adventure* books for kids. But Gumbrecht may be among the first scholars to extend such an invitation. The defenders of historical convention are not likely to receive it warmly.

Then again, Gumbrecht, a literature professor at Stanford, wouldn't have it any other way. "If I had a mission from God, to quote the Blues Brothers, it would be to flout traditional history writing," he declares. The model Gumbrecht wants to challenge is narrative history, with its implicit promise to diagnose yesterday's mistakes and so help us engineer a brighter tomorrow. It's a model, Gumbrecht acknowledges, that is already past its prime: Postmodern academics poke fun at the notion of historical truth, and "people no longer consult history when making decisions about everything from financial investments to sex."

Some historians might find such trends disheartening. Not Gumbrecht. Noting that films and books about the past are more popular than ever, he spots a paradox worthy of Bill Clinton: History has seen, at one and the same time, its truth-value crumble and its approval ratings soar. There's a lesson here for historians, he believes. Armchair history buffs seek not to draw lessons from the past but to "speak with the dead," to experience the sensual illusion of time travel. Thus Gumbrecht's determination to craft a "postdidactic" history.

Gumbrecht, who is forty-eight, is celebrated in his native Germany for the "California Graffiti" column he writes about his adoptive country in the magazine *Merkur*. Seven years ago, he published a fifteen-hundred-page history of Spanish literature—a book conceived in the last days of Franco's rule and designed to affirm the existence of progressive currents in Spanish thought. But Gumbrecht grew weary of his good intentions. He longed to create a bold new form, free of the "sandbox romanticism" of his earlier work. The year 1926 seemed like perfect material. Why? Precisely because nothing of great moment occurred in it. "You couldn't describe 1926 as a turning point in history or as an unfairly overlooked year," he asserts. It's easier to exorcise the ghost of Hegel when the dialectic is at a relative standstill.

GRETA GARBO


BABE RUTH

Written almost entirely in the present tense, and zooming cinematically from a lone woman swimming the English Channel to roof gardens in Manhattan, the book attempts to re-create the feeling of "being-in-1926," to borrow the author's Heideggerian formulation. The entries are a droll pastiche of literary criticism, sociological statistics, and historical anecdotes. In the entry "Boxing," for instance, Gumbrecht returns us to an era where "nothing seems to matter more than boxing," vividly illustrating his point by way of 1926 quotations from Jorge Luis Borges, Joan Miró, and the popular physicist A.S. Eddington. The entry's centerpiece is a newsreel-like account of the Jack Dempsey–Gene Tunney fight, drawn largely from *The New York Times:* "As Dempsey and Tunney make their entrance wearing 'the most up-to-date covering in the bathrobe line that has ever been seen in the history of the prize ring,' a heavy rain begins to fall on the open-air arena and on the crowd, and it continues throughout the fight."

"You couldn't describe 1926 as an unfairly overlooked year," says Gumbrecht.

ARCHIVE PHOTOS

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If there is a thread linking the book's fifty-one entries, it is the roar of 1920s modernism: the chaos and clamor of urban life; the emergence of Hollywood; the stirrings of women's liberation; the expansion of technology into everyday life; and the increasing influence of American culture abroad. But unlike other cultural historians of the period, Gumbrecht explicitly renounces any attempt to interpret, explain, or even contextualize the "life-world" of 1926. The effect is deliberately jarring in its refusal to foreshadow events. This is a book in which Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (published in 1926) is extensively quoted but the Holocaust is never mentioned. Says Gumbrecht, "My colleague Hayden White told me that, if you read the book without knowing what Hitler became, you'd see him as a right-wing ideologue in the downswing of his career—which is, in fact, how he appeared at the time."

True to his method, Gumbrecht also refuses to assess the documentary value of his sources, which range from newspapers to college handbooks to novels published in 1926. He writes about whatever catches his fancy, gleefully indifferent to the burdens of empirical demonstration. This free-wheeling approach occasionally leaves him deaf to the rumblings of discontent that social historians have taught us to hear. On the strength of a single article in German, for example, he writes of American clerical workers as "devoted to pleasing [and] strongly disposed to overlook the most flagrant forms of exploitation to which they are exposed." At the same time, Gumbrecht's capriciously constructed collage is full of delightful surprises. While *In 1926* trots out many of the Jazz Age's usual suspects—Brecht, Hemingway, Babe Ruth—the book also boasts a sly portrait of Argentine tango sensation Carlos Gardel and a witty account of the "Egyptomania" fad that swept New York City in 1926: "Tutankhamen umbrellas and Tutankhamen walking sticks are sold everywhere."

Researching *In 1926* presented fresh challenges. It goes without saying that historians are accustomed to time being out of joint, seesawing between past and present. That said, Gumbrecht took the historian's fractured consciousness to vertiginous extremes. He sifted through newspapers and novels in archives in Germany, Argentina, and the United States. He listened only to jazz from 1926 while driving. His cinematic diet consisted solely of silent films made that year. The calendar on his office wall was dated...1926. Soon enough, Gumbrecht's vicarious experience grew longer than the year itself. And since there was no document that would enable him to say conclusively that he was finished with his project, he realized that 1926 could consume the remainder of his life. There were moments, indeed, when he all but forgot that he was not living in 1926.

"It was a bit like Borges's story 'Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*,'" Gumbrecht recalls. "Pierre Menard got so deep in the seventeenth century he could write *Don Quixote* without looking at Cervantes." Pausing briefly, he adds, "In fact, Borges says he even improved it."

ADAM SHATZ

CANADA FRYE

IN 1972, AS HE WAS ABOUT TO TURN SIXTY, THE eminent literary critic Northrop Frye learned that his birthday would be observed in an unexpected and most disagreeable way. Maoist students were organizing meetings across Canada to denounce him as "the high priest of clerical obscurantism" whose thought-crimes would be sternly rectified once the Cultural Revolution hit the Great White North. Such ideological stalking had gone on for some years, and it upset Frye. But it was, in a way, a tribute to the University of Toronto professor's prominence in Canadian intellectual life, and well beyond. Frye exercised what the critic Murray Krieger once called "an influence—indeed an absolute hold—on a generation of developing literary critics greater and more exclusive than that of any one theorist in recent critical history." His many books were widely translated. Interviews with him appeared often in newspapers and on television in Canada. No wonder the Maoists urged their comrades across the globe to launch Anti-Northrop Frye Clubs.

That spark did not exactly start a prairie fire. But by the early 1970s, other theorists were crowding Frye from his place at the center of literary studies. His influence remained strong (near the end of the decade, he was listed as the eighth most-cited author in the humanities), yet Frye's work was starting to look distinctly arrière-garde. His first book, *Fearful*

H. ARMSTRONG ROBERTS

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Symmetry (1947), had argued for the coherence of Blake's vision and the depth of its roots in classical and English literature. (As a college freshman, Harold Bloom considered *Symmetry* "the best book I'd ever read about anything.") From the original draft of the Blake book, Frye spun out a second volume—and left a decisive mark on Anglophone criticism.

HAROLD FRYE, [illegible]

His *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) marked the beginning of the "turn to theory" in literary studies. A proto-structuralist analysis of genre, rhetoric, and narratology, it declared war on both old-style historicism and New Critical formalism. Frye presented readers with an all-encompassing model of the deep structures of the imagination, which he called "archetypes" (a term with Jungian overtones he would come to regret). Arguing that criticism should aspire to scientific rigor, the *Anatomy* offered a systematic account of myth, symbol, and irony as the genetic materials found in all species of literature, from epic to farce.

In the book's final pages, Frye anticipated that literary criticism would soon find its place in "the confused swirl of new intellectual activities associated with such words as communication, symbolism, semantics, linguistics, metalinguistics, pragmatics, cybernetics." Yet Frye himself was in many ways an old-fashioned humanist; and his title alluded not to the dissecting table but to such works as Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*—in which the peculiarities of an author's temperament are manifested through a labyrinthine structure of ideas and erudite citations.

Although his later writings displayed some interest in deconstruction, Frye remained, to the end, a dogged logocentrist. Indeed, he was a minister of the Word, ordained in 1936 by the United Church of Canada. His appearance and manner conveyed something of the parson; and over the years, his critical attention focused ever more closely on religious texts. He regarded familiarity with the Bible as essential for reading Western literature. In 1982, Frye published *The Great Code*, a study of the nexus between scripture and literature; the volume shot to the top of *MacLean's* best-seller list—almost dislodging *Jane Fonda's Workout Book* from the number-one slot.

Since the theorist's death in 1991, however, Frye's studies in archetypal criticism have had little following. But abroad, a Frye revival is under way. His essays can now be read in Hungary and Romania. Half a dozen of his volumes have appeared in Korea. Japanese scholars have translated nearly the entire oeuvre into their own language.

But the grandest tribute of all was unveiled by the University of Toronto Press: the *Collected Works*, projected to fill around thirty thick volumes. The series opened with the correspondence of Frye and Helen Kemp—an art student he met during his third year of college. ("It wasn't love at first sight," Frye later said, "but it was a very effortless operation.") The two abundantly annotated volumes document their courtship in the 1930s—thereby straddling the line between biographical detail and voyeurism. A third tome, exhuming his student essays, appeared in December. The other volumes, covering topics from critical theory to Canadian literature, should keep the press busy well into the next millennium. Indeed, the *Collected Works* project has the aura of a national monument: It will be the biggest edition of a twentieth-century literary critic's writings ever published in North America.

The volumes currently available span Frye's undergraduate and graduate years, when he was torn between theology and literature. A miserable experience as student minister to a backwoods congregation in Saskatchewan finally tipped the scale—but the prospect of academic life filled him with early gloom, too. "I guess I'm going to be a professor after all. Which is a horrible thought," he writes. "I seem to be anchored to my chair by my guts. A symptom of pedantry. Or sedentary." Yet he had an affinity for life in the library. In 1935 Frye writes to his fiancée: "Nothing has mattered, nothing has even existed, for the past six weeks but Blake, Blake, Blake: I've spun the man around like a teetotum, I've torn him into tiny shreds and anatomized him with pincers, I've stretched my mind over passages as though it were on a rack.... But what I have done is a masterpiece;

"I guess I'm going to be a professor after all. Which is a horrible thought. I seem to be anchored to my chair by my guts."

SUSAN SYDENHAM

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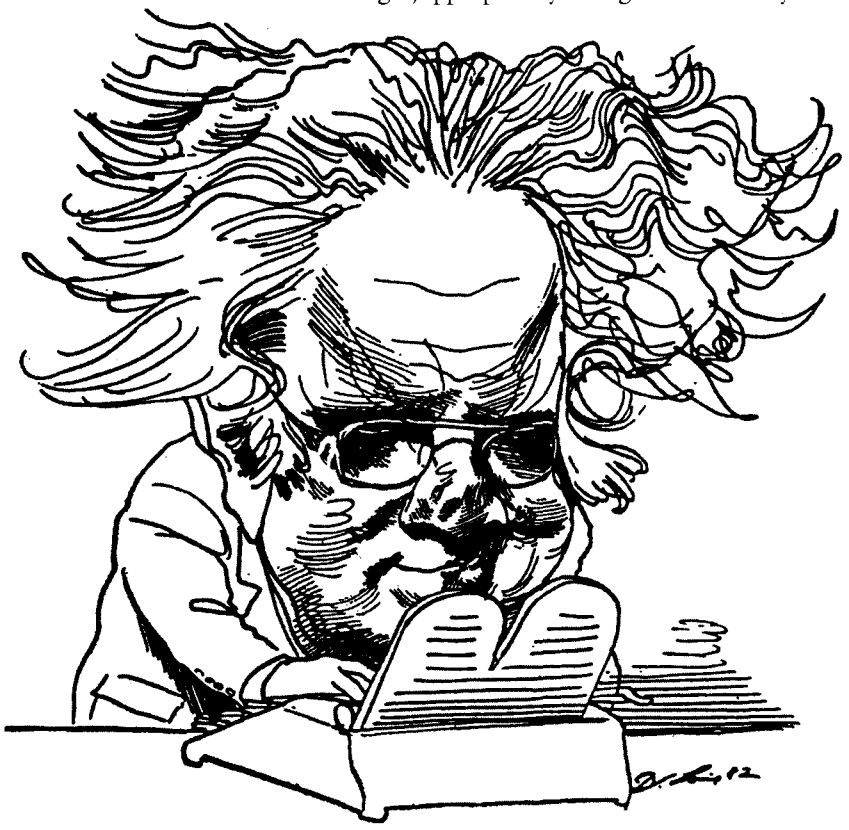
finely written, well handled, and the best, clearest, most accurate exposition of Blake's thought yet written." When Helen Kemp departs to study art history in England, "Norrie" carries her picture wedged into his copy of *The Four Zoas.*

Still more revealing, though less intimate, is the work collected in *Student Essays, 1932–38.* The young Frye's papers are gravid with the ideas that reached maturity with his later work. One recurrent influence is Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West,* with its comprehensive, Wagnerian staging of world history as the march of civilizations through an organic life cycle that ended in decadence and death. Frye came under the book's spell as a teenager, appropriately enough—and its encyclopedic grandeur made a lasting impression. An extensive paper on romanticism, written when Frye was twenty, sails away on gusts of Spenglerian jargon: Romanticism, he writes, "changes the status of woman from primarily mother to primarily wife—that is, from a time-symbol into a space-symbol." The *Letters* suggest that future space-symbol Helen never quite shared Norrie's fascination with such ideas.



For a contrast to Frye's juvenilia, one might look forward to *The Late Notebooks of Northrop Frye,* currently in preparation. The notebooks, from the last five years of his life, include ruminations on mystics like Jakob Böhme and a melancholy confrontation with the fact of mortality. (After almost fifty years of marriage, Helen Kemp died in 1986.) More striking than such topics, though, is some of Frye's language, reports editor Robert Denham, who teaches English at Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia. "He was so polite and serious," Denham notes. "It may be a shock when friends read his private writings and find him using all these four-letter words." There is, for example, a pungent evaluation of Spengler's apocalyptic vision as "Teutonic horseshit."

One of Frye's anxious concerns throughout the notebooks was the state of his own reputation. "He felt like his moment had passed by," Denham says. As, indeed, in some places, it had. But Frye, of all people, should have known better than to consider his decline in the West to be the end of the world. In 1994 the first Chinese conference on the thought of Northrop Frye was held in Beijing, organized by Professor Wu Chizhe of Inner Mongolia University, whose translation of *Anatomy of Criticism* is due out this summer.

The erstwhile Maoists of the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) could not be reached for comment.

SCOTT McLEMEE

THE MARTIN CHRONICLES

AS THE CENTURY'S PREMIER OPPONENT OF THE scientific worldview, Martin Heidegger articulated the anti-Enlightenment feelings that motivate figures as diverse as Jacques Derrida, Vaclav Havel, and the Unabomber. He protested against science, technology, and their alleged side-effects, which he described as "the darkening of the world, the flight of the gods, the destruction of the earth, the transformation of men into a mass, the hatred and suspicion of everything free and creative." This, in conjunction with the dismal facts of Heidegger's political career—namely, his early and enthusiastic support for Adolf Hitler—has spawned a heated debate about the relationship between science and totalitarianism. At one extreme are those who use Heidegger's Nazism to insinuate that criticism of scientific rationality inevitably leads to horrors like the Holocaust. At the other are those (including Heidegger) who urge us to see the Nazis' eventual rejection of Heidegger as proof that there is a direct link between scientific thinking and totalitarian politics.

German journalist Rüdiger Safranski's new book,

DAVID LEVINE

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Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil (Harvard), is the latest contribution to this debate. Safranski's book, which appeared in German four years ago, aspires to be equally a chronicle of Heidegger's life and an introduction to his thoughts. Safranski's Heidegger is neither towering philosophical genius nor Nazi master-thinker. Instead, he is a rather provincial man whose life was fundamentally constrained by the opacity of his own insights. The moral of Safranski's story is that the philosopher's antiscientific outlook may have inadvertently saved him from a deeper complicity with totalitarianism. Committed to the abstruse world of anti-Enlightenment mysticism, he could not quite bring himself down to the brutal, practical level of his Nazi associates.

Heidegger once wrote that "the ability to accept something greater above oneself is the true secret of greatness," and his life, on Safranski's telling, was a four-act quest for a suitably great Something. He begins his career as a gifted Catholic seminarian who views the True Church as the ultimate source of ancient—and nonscientific—authority. In Act II, he rejects Catholicism in favor of a philosophical father figure: Edmund Husserl, whose "phenomenological method," at least in Safranski's version, seems to consist in the slightly trippy practice of looking at things while trying to forget everything you know about them. Heidegger hopes, for a time, to use Husserl's insights to find some perspective "deeper" and "more original" than that of everyday common sense. Dissatisfied with the results—which include 1927's *Being and Time*, his most famous work—Heidegger enters a period of despondency and confusion. Soon after, he encounters yet a third potential authority, Adolf Hitler, whose "blood and soil" mysticism resonates with his own messianic tendencies. As rector of Frieburg University in 1933 and 1934, he gives a series of speeches that lend Nazism a measure of intellectual credibility. Eventually Heidegger leaves public life, disappointed more by his failure to be taken seriously as a Nazi than by Hitler himself, and enters his final phase. Returning to the religiosity of his youth, but

MARTIN HEIDEGGER

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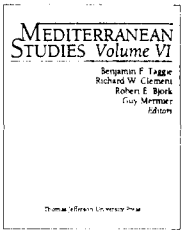

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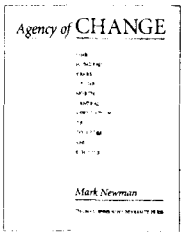

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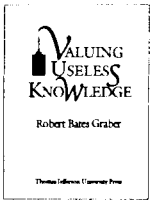

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in more cryptic fashion, he repositions himself as a John-the-Baptist figure, a man who would clear the ground for the "advent" of some as-yet-unnamed, fourth source of greatness.

It is the third of these four periods that is the most interesting, and also the most instructive. Heidegger joined the Nazi Party because he saw the movement as a kind of "metaphysical revolution," a "total overturning" of the German spirit. In Safranski's words, "he had a philosophical reason for Hitler, he introduced philosophical motives, and he constructed an entire imaginary philosophical stage for the historical happening [of Nazism]." And though he became frustrated with the realities of Nazi politics, the extent of his disillusionment remains unclear. Even as he offered veiled criticisms of National Socialism, he seems to have remained loyal to the Party and what he perceived as its core principles. He continued to wear his party insignia and to praise the movement into the early 1940s.

The Nazis were as befuddled by Heidegger as everyone else.

But if philosophy led Heidegger into the Nazi Party, it also determined his failure within it. For the Nazi bureaucrats quickly realized that they didn't need any more mystical prophets—after all, they had one of those already. Instead, the movement required scientists, practical men who could build the bridges and bombs that the Führer demanded. Reading the various Nazi critiques of Heidegger—one of which begins by noting that even Hitler "always acknowledges above him the laws of sound common sense"—it is hard to avoid an eerie sense of familiarity: The Nazis were as befuddled by Heidegger as everyone else.

Heidegger's main enemies within the Nazi Party were Erich Jaensch and Ernst Krieck, figures who, unlike Heidegger, have no claim to a permanent place in the philosophical canon. (Krieck was a former schoolteacher who worked his way up to become rector at Frankfurt University; Jaensch was a psychologist who wanted to supply Nazi racism with a solid scientific basis.) These two hard-line ideologues worked strenuously to limit Heidegger's influence, charging that Heidegger's Nazism was merely feigned. Their success can be measured by the fact that Heidegger was, in 1937, placed under surveillance by the Reich Central Security Department. (At the same time, it is testimony to Heidegger's charisma that the spy found

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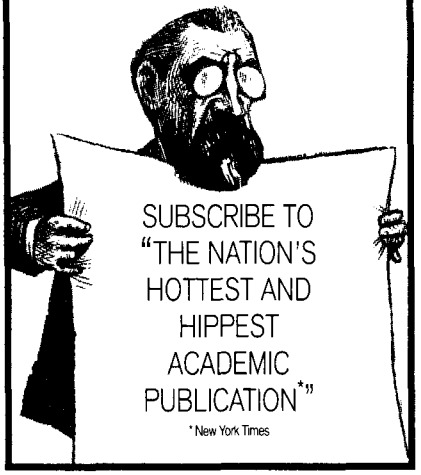

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himself unable to carry out his duties and eventually confessed to Heidegger.)

Jaensch and Krieck succeeded by trading on the perception that Heidegger was a charlatan with nothing substantive to say, a sentiment which, as Safranski's narrative shows, continually hampered Heidegger's quest for academic and political advancement: in 1930, when he was initially passed over for a professorship in Berlin; in 1933, when he was offered professorships at Berlin and Munich against the protests of both faculties; in his 1946 denazification hearings (during which Karl Jaspers, once one of Heidegger's closest philosophical allies, criticized his "fundamentally unfree, dictatorial, and uncommunicative...mode of thinking"); and in the early 1950s, when the Freiburg faculty debated restoring Heidegger's right to teach there. Heidegger's official position was that all this incomprehension proved that his thoughts were fundamental and deep, but Safranski demonstrates that Heidegger himself harbored significant doubts about his own work. In 1931, for example, a mere four years after publishing *Being and Time*, Heidegger admitted that he "had ventured out too far, beyond [his] own existential strength and without clearly perceiving the narrowness of what [he] could actually ask questions about."

And yet, for all that, Heidegger remains an immensely important intellectual figure who inspired intelligent people to do good things: Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Michel Foucault, and Paul Celan, not to mention countless nonphilosophers who have somehow found inspiration in Heidegger's writing. (Even Ethan Hawke, in *Reality Bites*, gets into the act, reading snatches of *Being and Time* when not singing in his rock band or sweeping Winona Ryder off her feet.) In his lectures on the history of philosophy, Heidegger shows that we do not have to view the philosophical tradition as a junkheap of failed speculation, a series of bad approximations to the truths of modern science. And in his own philosophy he provided an alternative to the timidity of contemporary analytic philosophy, proving that it is at least possible to try to take seriously such perennial questions as "why is there something rather than nothing?"

Heidegger may not have succeeded—but sometimes a grand failure is more significant than a modest success. In this sense, Safranski's biography, which inhabits the border between philosophy and history, is an apt tribute to a man who was neither philosopher nor charlatan, but rather a unique amalgamation of the two.

DMITRI TYMOCZKO

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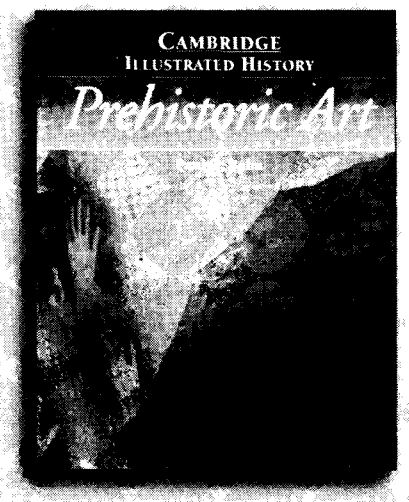

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INTERNATIONAL MAN OF MYSTERY

THE BATTLE OVER MIKHAIL BAKHTIN

BY **MATT STEINGLASS**

THE WORK OF RUSSIAN LITERARY theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975) has swept through academia like a successful retail chain. The "Bakhtin industry," as its members half jokingly call it, has opened franchises in the most far-flung disciplines, from literary studies to anthropology, from African-American studies to the philosophy of science. Regardless of disciplinary context, Bakhtin's name frequently connotes some kind of radical academic project.

This association is not new. Almost from the moment his work first appeared in the West thirty years ago, Bakhtin was identified as a revolutionary. His notion of "carnival," for example—a conception of a liberating zone in which oppressive social norms are riotously overthrown—has provided endless fodder for progressive intellectuals, from France's *soixante huitards* to today's scholars of popular culture.

But even as his influence was exploding, Bakhtin himself remained something of an enigma. In the view of many Bakhtinists, especially Russian ones, he was a conservative and deeply spiritual man, the very antithesis of the revolutionary; he would have been bemused—if not appalled—by the uses to which his work has been put by contemporary academics. To make matters even murkier, scholars have long debated whether Bakhtin is the author of several celebrated works of literary theory that originally appeared in the Soviet Union under other authors' names. By 1990, this "disputed texts" controversy had become the most hotly contested topic in Bakhtin studies, drawing into its nexus a host of ideological oppositions: between structuralists and humanists, neo-Marxists and anti-Marxists, postcolonial multiculturalists and academic conservatives, and the Western and Russian Bakhtinian communities as a whole.

AT THE center of the controversy are three books published in the late 1920s and officially credited to Bakhtin's associates. Two titles, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *Freudianism: A Critical Sketch*, appeared under the name Valentin Voloshinov, and a third, *The Formal Method in Literary Criticism*, under the name Pavel Medvedev. All three books explicitly declare themselves works of Marxist scholarship. At the same time, all three are rife with Bakhtinian concepts and turns of phrase. There is an obvious explanation: Medvedev and Voloshinov, both well-connected Marxist critics, were friends of Bakhtin's. But from the time the books appeared, rumors circulated in Russian academic circles that Bakhtin himself was the author of all three books. According to this theory, the Russian scholar, who was short of money at the time, convinced his friends to let him use their more politically viable names to get into print.

To many of his admirers, the idea that Bakhtin may have authored some avowedly Marxist works hardly comes as a shock. But among Bakhtinists, there is a solid consensus that he was never a Marxist in any sense of the word. None

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of the major works published under his own name adopts an explicitly Marxist stance or makes significant use of Marxist terminology; and there is a good deal of evidence that he disliked Marxism in general. Perhaps most importantly, a recurring theme in all of Bakhtin's writings is his opposition to totalizing ideologies of any kind. In the Soviet context, Marxism was the very definition of a totalizing ideology.

Could it be that several key texts of Marxist literary theory were in fact written by a foe of Marxism? In the case of one of the disputed books, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, the question is particularly germane. This text is taught in literary theory classes across the country—often as one of the first and most important Marxist forays into linguistics. ("One of the best general introductions to linguistic study as a whole," the theorist Fredric Jameson has called it.) If Bakhtin wrote the book, then its Marxist passages—ones in which the author declares that his purpose is "to bring out the position that the philosophy of language occupies in the Marxist world view"—are probably not what they seem. They may be obligatory or even parodic. But does this matter? If the book can be integrated into a Marxist worldview, should it be, regardless of its author's convictions? Does it matter whether the author meant what he was saying? The disputed-texts controversy keeps forcing Bakhtinists to confront that most perplexing of theoretical questions: What does it mean to "mean"?

• • • • •

A document without a signature, obligating no one and obliged to nothing.
—Bakhtin, "Toward a Philosophy of the Act"

The disputed-texts conflict first erupted into the public view almost thirty years ago, at a birthday party. On November 25, 1970, a group of scholars convened in the Laboratory for Computer Linguistics, inside the vast, Stalinist-Gothic skyscraper of Moscow State University, to celebrate Bakhtin's seventy-fifth birthday. Tea was drunk; cake was eaten; papers dedicated to Bakhtin were read aloud.

In the third of these papers, the prominent literary critic Vyacheslav V. Ivanov dropped a bombshell. In the published version of Ivanov's remarks, his revelation formed the 101st and final footnote:

> The basic texts of [the disputed works] are by M.M. Bakhtin.... V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev, under whose names they were published, made only small insertions and changes in particular parts.... That all the works belong to the same author, which is confirmed by the testimony of witnesses, is evident from their very texts, as one may easily convince oneself by the quotations presented.

The maddening inexactitude of Ivanov's footnote is typical of the whole disputed-texts affair. Who are these "witnesses" with their "testimony"? And why were they needed in 1970, when Bakhtin was still alive and available to answer questions? Why all the mystery and intrigue?

To answer these questions, one must understand Bakhtin's position in Soviet literary culture at the time. By 1970 he had become one of the leading lights of Russian literary criticism after a career whose plot, some would say, resembled a Russian *skazka*, or fairy tale, for all of its improbability.

WHAT WOULD IT MEAN IF THE MOST IMPORTANT MARXIST FORAY INTO LINGUISTICS WAS WRITTEN BY A NON-MARXIST?

Bakhtin graduated from the classics department of what was then Petersburg University in 1918, the first year of Soviet power. During those first chaotic years after the revolution, he led a freewheeling creative life in the towns of Nevel and Vitebsk, where the cream of Russia's artistic and intellectual world—Malevich, Chagall, El Lissitzky—had taken refuge from the hunger and confusion of civil war. Bakhtin and his circle of friends debated God and socialism, wrote articles whenever possible, and sat up late at night engaging in prolonged, tea-drenched philosophical discussion. Among these friends were Voloshinov and Medvedev.

Bakhtin returned to the newly renamed Leningrad in 1924 to find a city devastated by war and recession. It was difficult for him to get work. He had few connections, and very little money; his wife resorted to making stuffed animals to supplement their income. To make matters worse, Bakhtin was suffering from osteomyelitis, a bone disease that eventually necessitated the amputation of one of his legs. It was during this lean period that he allegedly published books and articles under the names of his well-connected friends Voloshinov and Medvedev, who by the late 1920s were well on their way to becoming full-fledged members of the Party intellectual establishment.

Whatever else he may have written during this period, we know that Bakhtin completed one major project under his own name: *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art*, a book in which one would be hard-pressed to find a Marxist impulse or argument. By late 1928, the book had been accepted for publication, but Bakhtin's timing could not have been worse. At the end of that year, there was a crackdown on the circle of religious intellectuals with whom he had been loosely connected. On Christmas Eve—January 6, in the Russian Orthodox tradition—Bakhtin was arrested and sentenced to ten years' exile in the far north. But fate intervened: His book came out in the spring and was favorably reviewed by the Commissar of Enlightenment, the relatively open-minded Anatoly Lunacharsky. This review, along with Bakhtin's worsening health, convinced the authorities to commute his sentence to a six-year term in the milder climate of Kustanai, in Kazakhstan.

IN the USSR, 1930 was a turning point. In the 1920s, there was some measure of economic pluralism and cultural freedom; after 1930, the iron fist closed. Forced collectivization ensued, accompanied by a

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monolithic cultural conservatism and the elimination of the last remnants of political dissent. As the Stalinist night set in, Bakhtin vanished into obscurity.

Thirty years later, in the midst of the Khrushchev cultural thaw, a trio of young literature students at the Gorky Institute came across Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky. The students were impressed and fascinated by the book but assumed that its author, like so many intellectuals of his generation, had long ago met his end in a labor camp or Siberian frontier town. They were amazed to discover that Bakhtin was alive and leading a comfortable life as a literature professor in Saransk, four hundred miles east of Moscow, at an institution with a name straight out of a Peter Sellers movie: the

Ogarev University of Mordovia. The three students at the Gorky Institute struck up a correspondence with Bakhtin. Soon, they were visiting the master in his remote retreat and coaxing him to organize the voluminous notes and written fragments he had amassed over the years into coherent, publishable form. Bakhtin's three rediscoverers were determined to drag him back into the center of Russian intellectual life.

They succeeded handily. Largely as a result of their efforts, Russia in the 1960s experienced a tremendous Bakhtin vogue. His book on Dostoevsky was substantially revised and republished as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in 1963. Two years later, Bakhtin's doctoral dissertation on Rabelais, which he had defended in the mid-1940s, appeared in an adapted form as *The Work of François Rabelais and Folk Culture of the Middle Ages*. In 1968, on the strength of an English translation of this book, Bakhtin's fame spread to the West. The international cult of Bakhtin was born.

Yet Bakhtin's global celebrity hardly jibes with the picture of the retiring scholar painted by his admirers in these years. He was an absentminded and impractical philosophizer, without personal ambition, deeply egalitarian, a man whose great desire in life was to sit up drinking tea and discussing Dostoevsky with his friends. From his devotees, we have an account of Bakhtin, in the late 1930s, gaining a commission to write an article for the Soviet *Literary Encyclopedia*, only to have it go unpublished because his entry—on satire—had the misfortune to fall into the same volume as an entry on Stalin, and therefore proved too sensitive for release. Then there is the story about Bakhtin in the winter of 1941 using the air-dropped propaganda leaflets of the advancing Nazis as texts for students in his German language classes. Most famously, we have Bakhtin, short of rolling paper for his cigarettes, smoking away the entire manuscript of his work on the bildungsroman. It has been suggested that some of the more vivid episodes in Bakhtin's life may be a bit apocryphal, the result of his own storytelling impulse and a hagiographic desire on the part of his devotees. And yet, who knows? It was a strange century the Russians had.

AT THE time of his birthday party in 1970, rumors concerning Bakhtin's authorship of the disputed texts were again in circulation—fomented by a few surviving veterans of the Leningrad literary scene of the 1920s. But no one had made the claim public because, whenever Bakhtin was confronted on the matter, he refused to speak for the record. Why, then, did Ivanov decide to bring the claims out into the open?

The answer is clear enough: Ivanov was embroiled in a vicious literary quarrel and needed Bakhtin on his side. Bakhtin's status as the grand old man of Russian letters, the voice of the pre-Stalinist past, made him a strategic prize in the main conflict in Russian literary criticism of the period. This dispute had little to do with attitudes toward Marxism; instead, it revolved around attitudes toward structuralism.

The two camps in this struggle were known as the "physicists" and the "lyricists." The physicists included Yuri Lotman, Lydia Ginzburg, and the Estonian-based Tartu School of structuralism, which had risen to prominence in the 1960s. These scholars conceived of literature in terms of its internal systems of signs and codes, and in the post-Stalinist Soviet Union, this seemingly impartial methodology had the advantage of appearing to avoid the dangers of more overtly ideological criticism. The physicists also had a respected pedigree: They were considered heirs to the much-admired Russian formalist tradition of the 1910s and 1920s. Ivanov was a physicist.

The lyricists, on the other hand, were a group of vaguely humanist literary critics; during the 1960s, some members veered toward religious nationalism—the same cultural wave that produced Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Among the main exponents of this antistructuralist, religious-nationalist thought was one of Bakhtin's Gorky Institute disciples, Vadim Kozhinov. Attracted to Christian themes in Bakhtin's work—such as his discussion of the "word made flesh," in which Kozhinov perceived the influence of medieval Russian mystics—he eagerly pored over the master's unpublished manuscripts. He used his access to this material to quote Bakhtin selectively in his polemics against structuralism.

Undaunted, the physicists maintained that Bakhtin was much closer to structuralism and semiotics than his lyricist devotees would allow. Finally, Ivanov responded to Kozhinov's quotation-citing tactics in kind. In the opening two pages of his essay, Ivanov quotes from the disputed texts eleven times, and almost every citation contains the words "semiotic" or "sign." When Ivanov openly attributed the disputed texts to Bakhtin, he did so in order to deal his opponents a decisive blow.

But the lyricists were unfazed. In fact, they accepted Ivanov's revelation. To some extent, in their desire to promote Bakhtin's legacy, the lyricists may have wanted to attribute everything intelli-

ROBERT P. MATTHEWS

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gent written in the 1920s to him. But on a more practical level, the disputed texts, while employing much semiotic terminology, happen to be highly critical of the formalists in ways that can be used to polemicize against structuralism as well. The lyricists were just as happy as the physicists to attribute these texts to the master. By the late 1970s, there was a broad consensus in Russia that Bakhtin had written the disputed texts.

• • • • •

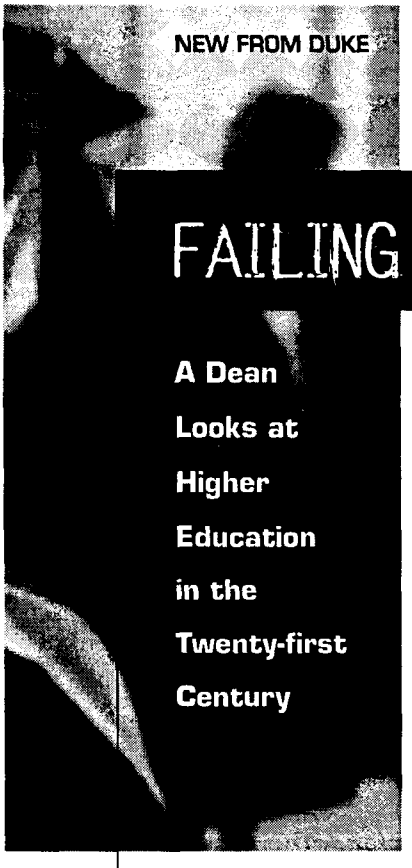
> Contexts of usage for one and the same word often contrast with one another. The classical instance of such contrasting contexts of usage for one and the same word is found in dialogue. In the alternating lines of a dialogue, the same word may figure in two mutually clashing contexts. Of course, dialogue is only the most graphic and obvious instance of varidirectional contexts. Actually, any real utterance, in one way or another or to one degree or another, makes a statement of agreement with or a negation of something. Contexts do not stand side by side in a row, as if unaware of one another, but are in a state of constant tension, or incessant interaction and conflict.
>
> Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

In recent years, by far the most influential of Bakhtin's concepts has been his notion of "dialogue." Bakhtin argued that every utterance—a wink, a book, a painting—is intended for a particular audience and therefore part of an ongoing dialogue, a shared social context. This is the gist of his argument with formalism and structuralism: An utterance cannot be understood only with reference to its structure; it must be seen in the context of other utterances to which it responds. Bakhtin believed that the dialogic nature of language finds its apotheosis in Dostoevsky's novels, where, as he put it, "No word is without its intense sideward glance at someone else's word."

In *The Brothers Karamazov,* for example, Bakhtin traces how Ivan Karamazov's internal dilemmas are affected by his discussions with the book's other characters. Ivan is not sure he believes that "all is permitted"; he raises the idea with the Christian fathers at the local monastery in the hopes of provoking an angry response. But Ivan proposes the same idea to the canny but unsophisticated servant Smerdyakov, who interprets it as a subtle invitation to kill Ivan's father—which he eventually does. For Bakhtin, Ivan's interactions with others and the various effects they produce are dramatic illustrations of the way a statement's meaning is transformed as it passes from one dialogic context to another.

In a similar fashion, the terms of the disputed-texts controversy shifted radically as it passed from the Russian context to the Western one. In the West, it soon became a dispute about Marxism.

Among the first Western scholars to react skeptically to the Bakhtin authorship claim was I.R. Titunik, a professor of Slavic languages at the University of Michigan who was in the process of publishing an English translation of Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* just as Ivanov's paper appeared in 1973. Titunik mistrusted the fogginess and secrecy of Soviet academia. "It is common practice," he later wrote, "in countries like the Soviet Union to remake the past by fiat; we see no reason to follow suit." Other scholars intimated that the Russians thought they could sell more books under Bakhtin's name. They suggested that the Soviet copyright agency, VAAP, might be behind the move for reattribution. The Soviet Union had joined the international copyright treaty in 1972, and agents of VAAP had tried to get Bakhtin to acknowledge author-



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THE MARXIST PASSAGES IN THE BOOKS, SUGGESTED CLARK AND HOLQUIST, SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD AS BAKHTIN'S ATTEMPT TO "VENTRILOQUIZE" HIS FRIENDS' STYLES.

ship of the disputed texts; he had refused.

Then, in 1984, after years of painstaking research, Yale professors Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist published their jointly written biography, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Harvard). Endorsing the Russian consensus, Clark and Holquist not only asserted Bakhtin's authorship of the disputed texts but devoted as much space to them as to major works published under his own name.

Arguing that he wrote the disputed texts "as" Voloshinov and Medvedev, Clark and Holquist explained that Bakhtin had a very loose sense of "ownership" of texts, that he cared little for attributions, and, of course, that he needed the money. The Marxist passages in the books, they suggested, should be understood as Bakhtin's attempt to "ventriloquize" his friends' styles. But more importantly, Clark and Holquist insisted that the Marxism of the disputed texts had been exaggerated and mischaracterized. The attack on the formalists in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language,* for example, centered around formalism's failure to integrate historical and social context into its theory of literature. This criticism happens to coincide closely with Bakhtin's own view, though he had a complex vision of the interrelationship of language, society, and history, which Marxists did not share.

Elsewhere, in a critique of Saussurean linguistics, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* argues that language is the social medium par excellence and that the history of linguistic—and literary—development is the history of people using, appropriating, twisting, and reforming language in the constant call and response of social activity. This might well be a Marxist argument; or it might be a non-Marxist, Bakhtinian argument. Take away a few hortatory proclamations—such as "the Marxist method bears directly upon these problems"—and there is nothing in the book that conflicts with Bakhtin's other writings.

Clark and Holquist also claimed to have more concrete evidence that Bakhtin had written the disputed texts. However, the evidence they provided was mostly secondhand: remarks Bakhtin's disciples said they had heard him make on various occasions. In their most categorical statement, the biographers claimed that Bakhtin had written an article, "Contemporary Vitalism," under the name of his friend, the biologist Kanaev. When questioned, Clark and Holquist said they had incontrovertible evidence to support their claim. But due to unspecified personal com-

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mitments, they could not divulge it.

Clark and Holquist's book was greeted as the definitive biography of Bakhtin—a status it still holds today. But Princeton Slavic studies professor Caryl Emerson found herself growing increasingly skeptical. In 1984, when she translated Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics,* she had accepted Clark and Holquist's thesis that Bakhtin "gave away his manuscripts to his friends." But by 1989, she no longer believed the evidence was persuasive. "We assumed what we heard in the early 1980s was true," says Emerson. "But by the late 1980s, there was still no documentary evidence; no manuscripts had come to light that would have indicated whether [the books were] Bakhtin's, Voloshinov's, or Medvedev's." Emerson teamed up with another skeptic, Gary Saul Morson, at Northwestern University, to write a critical study which mounted a powerful case against attributing the disputed texts to Bakhtin. The result of their collaboration was *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford, 1990).

First, Morson and Emerson argued, the burden of proof in any attempt to reattribute the authorship of a book should fall on those who advocate the change, and since no material evidence had surfaced, Voloshinov and Medvedev should remain the presumptive authors. Second, Morson and Emerson suggested why it might be in the interests of Soviet and Western editors and publishers to attribute the books to Bakhtin, regardless of the shakiness of the evidence. Third, they noted the "hagiographical" character of the intellectual cult of Bakhtin, which might account for a desire to ascribe all interesting texts to him—much as Hermes Trismegistus became the "author" of all medieval texts on alchemy.

But finally, Morson and Emerson's case returned, again, to the Marxism of the disputed texts. The attribution of these Marxist texts to a non-Marxist had necessitated "Byzantine reading strategies," they argued. Why go through all the trouble? "Voloshinov and Medvedev's works are sincerely Marxist," they wrote. "In our view, they represent a particularly complex and rewarding form of Marxism, and are among the strongest works on language and literature of our century."

Curiously, this praise for the sophisticated Marxism of the disputed texts came from two scholars who themselves had little sympathy for Marxism. In fact, elsewhere in *Creation of a Prosaics,* Morson and Emerson repeatedly try to separate Bakhtin, whose thought they admire, from any version of Marxism, which they do not. Their vision of Bakhtin is one of a man who would have objected to Marxism as overly programmatic and hostile toward human agency. They quote Sartre observing that "Marxism tends to 'dissolve' real, historical people 'in a bath of sulphuric acid'" and add that "Bakhtin would doubtless have agreed with this critique."

IN MORE recent essays and in a new book, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton), Emerson has continued to argue for Bakhtin's resolutely apolitical stance. "When admirers of [Bakhtin's] thought smuggle politics into his scenarios," she wrote in 1995, "more often than not the result is appallingly contrary to Bakhtin's overall orientation. (We witness just such distortion, for example, when 'carnival' is attached to the spirit of Marxian revolution or when Bakhtin's rogues, jesters, and fools are celebrated as 'the organized voice of the oppressed.')" She adds: "Bakhtin would have found unsatisfactory...current aggrieved readings of Mark Twain as a racist or Shakespeare as a sexist."

Morson, too, has independently elaborated a vision of Bakhtin as a "radical conservative." "At odds with reigning American orthodoxies," Morson writes in a 1993 essay, "Bakhtin believed without apology in the value of the Western literary tradition.... He did not believe in the 'death of the author.'" Morson's position on the disputed-texts question is unwavering: "The unnecessary, unsupported, and arbitrary ascription to [Bakhtin] of V.N. Voloshinov's and P.N. Medvedev's books created the weird impression that he was some sort of Marxist."

Morson and Emerson's effort to reclaim an antirevolutionary Bakhtin is at least partially motivated by the reception of Bakhtin in the West. The study of Rabelais, the first of Bakhtin's books to be translated, contains his ideas on "carnival," and happened to appear just before the 1968 Paris student uprising, which many at the time saw as carnival in action.

This coincidence has colored Bakhtin's reception here, making him seem like a Russian variety of the French engagé critic. Julia Kristeva extrapolated her theory of intertextuality from Bakhtin's thoughts on dialogue. Fredric Jameson used Bakhtinian dialogue in *The Political Unconscious* to articulate the way that hegemonic discourses contain and replicate counter-discourses. African-American studies scholars, including Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Houston Baker Jr., have forged a link between Bakhtin's "double-voiced word" and W.E.B. Du Bois's famous description of the "double consciousness" of African-Americans.

Throughout the 1980s, the conflict over Bakhtin's personal politics, and over his authorship of the disputed texts, developed in the self-contained environment of Western Slavists. With the exception of Clark and Holquist, Western links to Russian Bakhtinists remained tenuous. But in July 1991, just a month before the fall of Soviet communism, Russian and Western Bakhtinists came face-to-face in large numbers for the first time, at the Fifth International Bakhtin Conference, in Manchester, England. And here, the conflict shifted contexts once again, this time becoming something like a Tower of Babel of mutual incomprehension.

• • • • •

> For the word is not a material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction. It never gravitates toward a single consciousness or a single voice. The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation.
>
> —Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

These days, Russian intellectuals do not call people they like Marxists. Nor do they call thinkers they admire political. The very word "political," as the Russian Bakhtinist Vitaly Makhlin puts it, sounds "somewhat odious" to contemporary Russian ears.

Russian Bakhtinists at the Manchester conference met the more political interpretations of Bakhtin presented by Western academics with dismay. They were unable to comprehend how Western academics could enlist Bakhtin in propounding the "utterly discredited dis-

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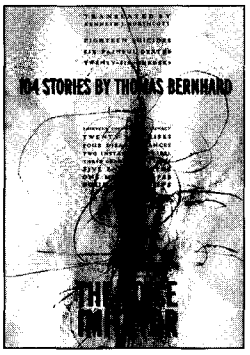

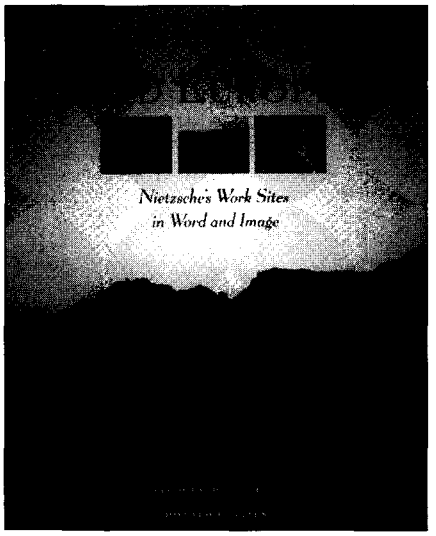

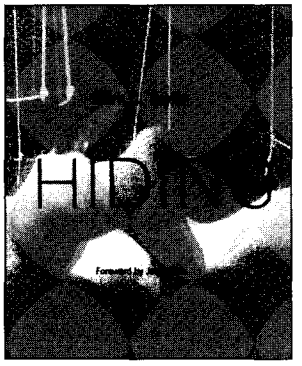

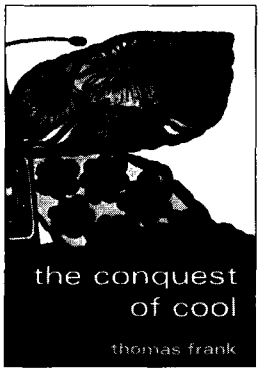

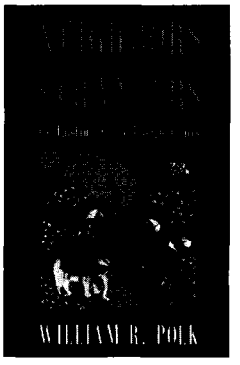

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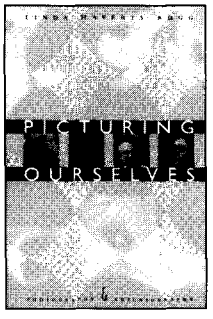

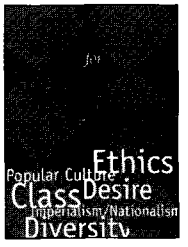

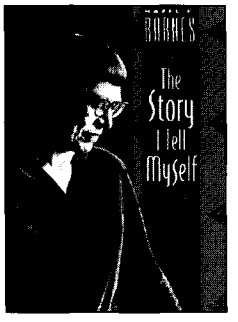

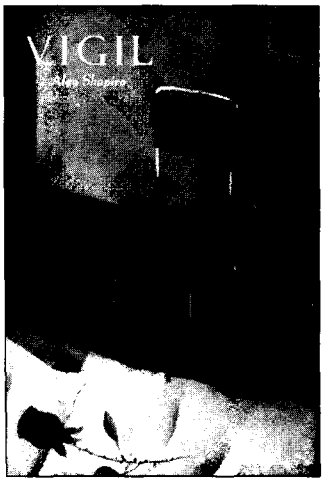

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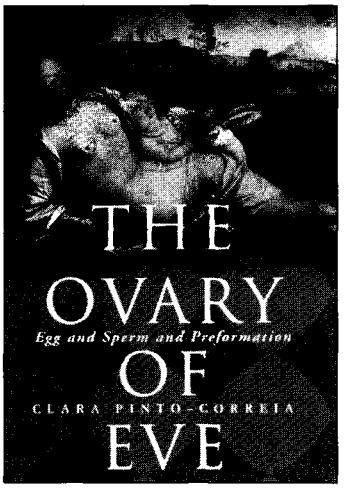

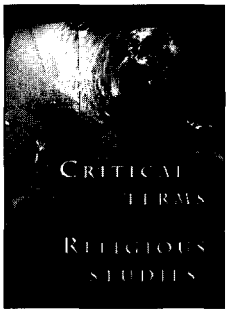

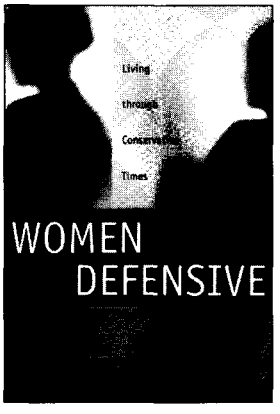

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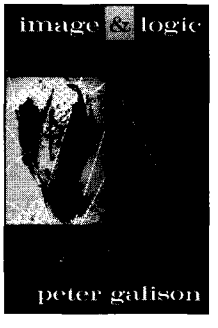

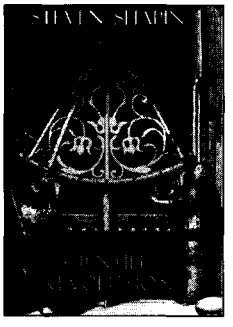

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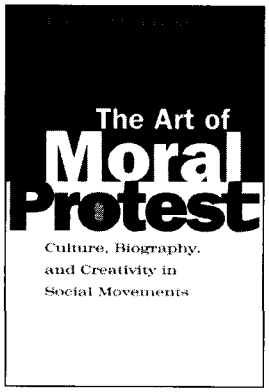

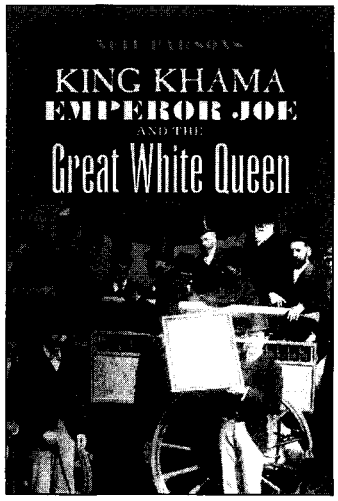

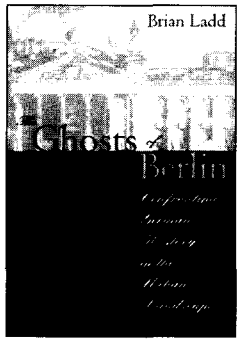

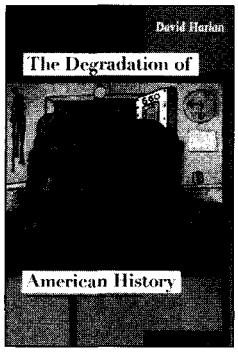

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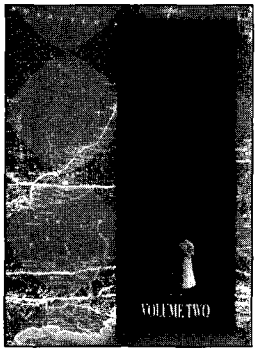

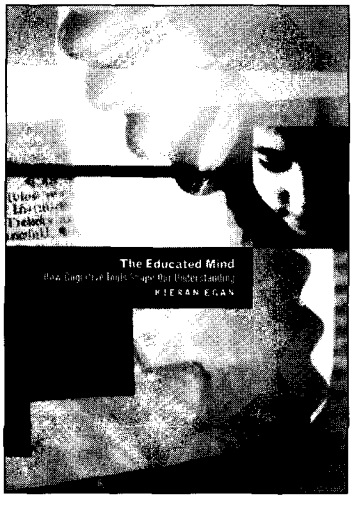

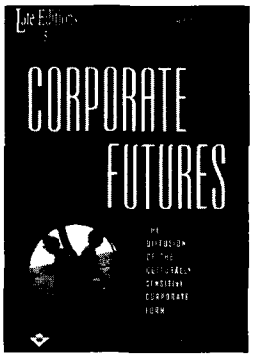

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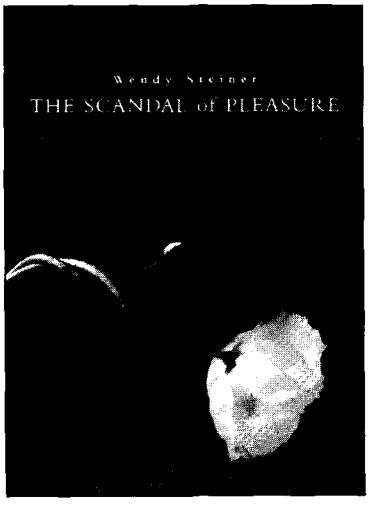

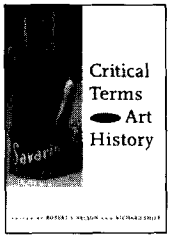

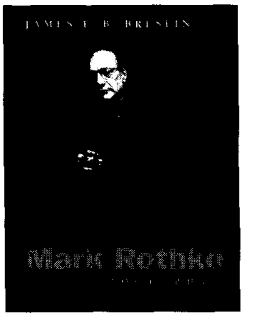

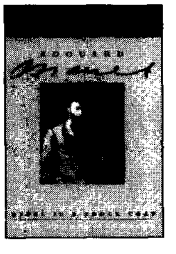

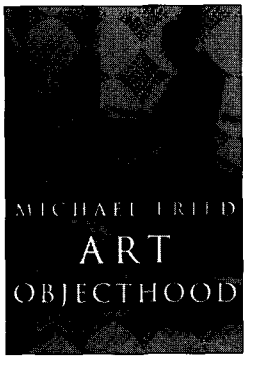

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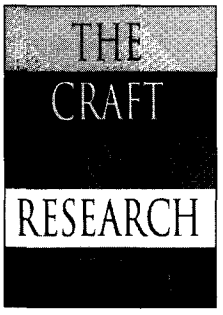

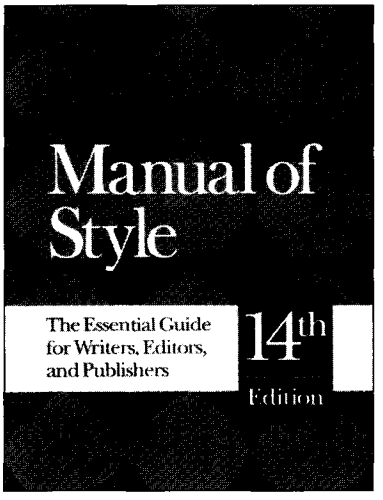

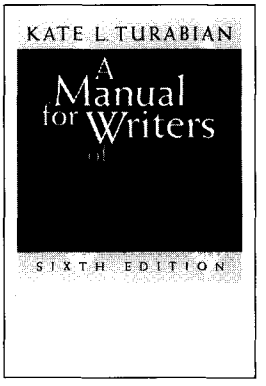

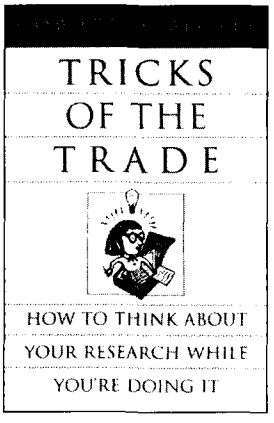

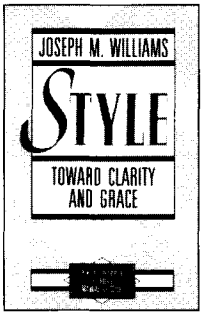

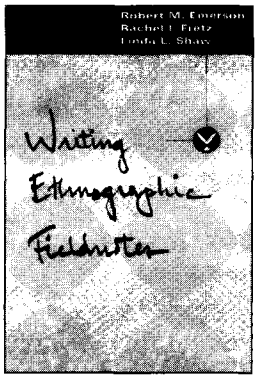

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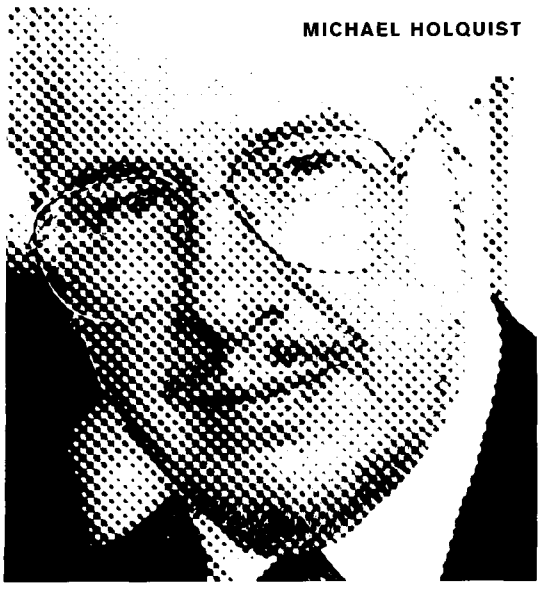

MICHAEL HOLQUIST

THE RUSSIAN AND WESTERN RECEPTIONS OF BAKHTIN WERE ALMOST DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED.

courses" of Marxism and feminism. In delivering his paper at Manchester, Vyacheslav Ivanov, while discussing Bakhtin's purported relevance to various neurological topics, managed to slip in an ad hoc comment about recent discoveries of substantial differences between the male and female brains. This did nothing to improve relations between the Russian and Western contingents.

Another source of tension was a natural proprietary attitude on the part of the Russian Bakhtinists. It was absurd, they felt, for non-Russian-speaking Westerners with no understanding of Soviet intellectual history to lecture them on the meaning of Bakhtin. And the Russians were further baffled by Western Bakhtinology's fascination with the disputed-texts controversy. For the Russians, it was clear that Bakhtin was the author of these books. Furthermore, the books' Marxist language did not particularly interest them; in the Russians' view, the entire Soviet literary corpus is filled with Marxist boilerplate that reveals nothing about its authors' convictions.

At the conference, the Russian and Western receptions of Bakhtin were almost diametrically opposed, in a fashion that curiously inverts the clichés of ideological opposition between Russia and the West. The West's Bakhtin was typically oriented toward the *social* or *interpersonal* determination of language—the "sideward glance" my word casts toward everyone else's. Russia's Bakhtin was oriented in precisely the opposite direction. He is the thinker who imagines how the *individual* may claim authorship of his own word—how I can assert the freedom of my own utterance, over and against the social milieu.

Vitaly Makhlin, often cited as the Russian academic with the best understanding of Bakhtin's Western reception, has summed up this inversion for a Russian audience:

> If in Bakhtin's homeland in the period "after communism" we are witnesses to a trend which, in both elite and mass culture, tries almost polemically to prove and demonstrate that, living in society, it is possible to be free from society, possible socially to assert and justify oneself "on the far side of the social," then in other countries—in contrast to the absolute majority of post-Soviet approaches and evaluations of Bakhtin's thought—social intuitions, social evaluations predominate.

An individualist interpretation of Bakhtin seems utterly implausible to the Western reader. The Bakhtin of dialogue, of the border-blurring communal "carnival body" an individualist? It is difficult to imagine a Western reader invoking Bakhtin's name in the same sentence with those of John Locke and J.S. Mill. But what if, throughout your education, you had been exposed only to views of language as a vast, impersonal force determined by social and historical pressures? What if all the critical theory you had read treated literature uniformly, as the product of economic and social events? Imagine if the Romantic vision of the will to self-expression, so absurdly dominant in American popular culture, were entirely absent from your official literature, circulating instead only as an underground, "private" samizdat thesis. *Then* try reading Bakhtin.

Once figure and ground are reversed in this way, a completely different Bakhtin leaps to the fore. Suddenly, the hero becomes the individual speaker, wresting control over her word out of the lifeless grasp of the *OED* and the *Chicago Manual of Style*. Bakhtin becomes the philosopher of responsibility for one's own word—the philosopher of authorship.

• • • • •

> A man never coincides with himself. One *cannot* apply to him the formula of identity A=A.
>
> —Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

Since the Manchester conference, the divided Bakhtin industries of West and East have begun to merge into one discursive community. Russian and Western Bakhtinists all go to the same conferences now, and all have access to largely complete editions of Bakhtin's texts. At the same time, some of the issues that once divided the two communities have faded. Marxism in the West elicits more polite smiles now; the question of whether Bakhtin was a Marxist seems rather tired and anachronistic. Bakhtin has come to be seen as a thinker specifically of his times—one with neo-Kantian roots, whose ideas evolved in the peculiar conditions of the Soviet twentieth century.

On the issue of the disputed texts, however, differences between the American and the Russian responses persist. In Russia, the consensus on Bakhtin's authorship remains strong enough that, under the editorship of Vitaly Makhlin, all of the disputed texts are being republished in a series titled *Bakhtin Under a Mask*. At last, Voloshinov and Medvedev have had their names stripped from the covers. In America, meanwhile, although the majority of Bakhtinists believe Bakhtin wrote the books, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* continues to appear under Voloshinov's name.

So should the disputed texts be integrated into Bakhtin's canon or not? What should we make of the conflict between the "conflationists" who would do so and "non-conflationists" who would not?

Recently, the anecdotal evidence that persuaded Russian scholars of Bakhtin's

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CARYL EMERSON SAYS, "I CHOOSE TO RESPECT BAKHTIN'S OWN RETICENCE IN SIGNING THESE TEXTS. I THINK YOU HAVE TO RESPECT AN AUTHOR IN TERMS OF HIS OWN SIGNATURE."

authorship has been presented more forcefully to a Western audience. Sergei Bocharov, one of Bakhtin's rediscoverers, published an article in the *Papers of the Modern Language Association* in 1994 that went a long way toward settling the debate. The article recounted Bocharov's conversations with Bakhtin in the early 1970s. According to Bocharov, Bakhtin made it clear that he had largely written the texts but did not want to claim authorship because he did not approve of the form in which they were published. It is not clear whether his misgivings stemmed from additions that were not to his liking or from his having deliberately written the books in a voice not entirely his own.

Bocharov's article also made public the "proof" that Clark and Holquist had referred to in their biography—the decisive evidence that Bakhtin had written the article "Contemporary Vitalism" in Kanaev's name. This consisted primarily of a letter from Kanaev, in which he stated: "I am sending you a photocopy of an article by M.M. [Bakhtin] published under my name. I already told you that in the summer of 1925 M.M. was living in Peterhof and, as usual during those years, was short of money. He wrote this article to earn some. I did not take part in the writing but only procured the necessary works and facilitated publication." Obviously, this letter says nothing about the other, more important disputed texts; but it does render the possibility that Bakhtin wrote them more plausible.

One Western Bakhtinist whose views have shifted over the last few years is Caryl Emerson. She still believes that Bakhtin should not be credited as the author, but she is no longer so sure that he didn't actually write them. "I choose to respect Bakhtin's own reticence in signing these texts," she says. "That does not assume that he didn't write them.... I am now more sympathetic to the possibility that a large portion of the actual prose—not just the ideas and inspiration—was penned by Bakhtin." Her continued "nonconflationist" stance is based on her conviction that one ought to respect Bakhtin's own right to dissociate himself from the texts. "However much he authored and gifted

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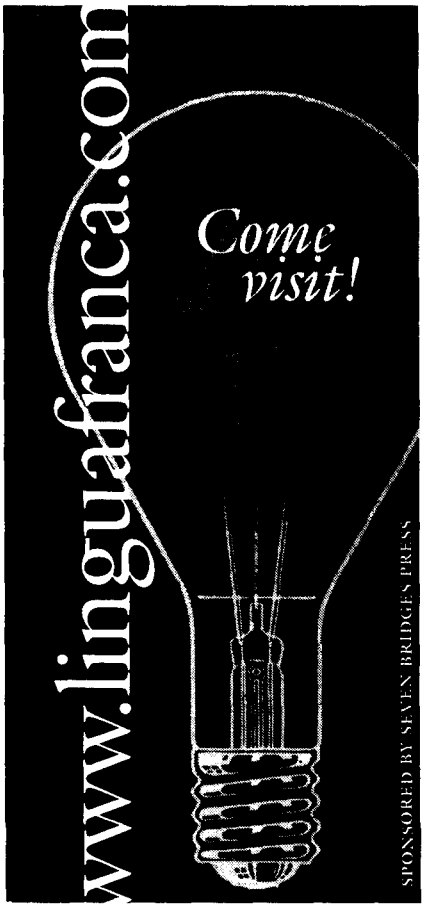

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BAKHTIN, 1974

these texts to others," she says, "Bakhtin felt that the form in which they were published in the 1920s was not a form to which he chose to sign his name. I think you have to respect an author in terms of his own signature."

OF COURSE, if we follow Bakhtin's thoughts on this issue, the question of an author's "signature" becomes complicated. An author's work always emerges from a dialogue with other voices: journalists with their editors and with the newspaper-buying public; novelists with other novelists and with the novel-reading public. For Bakhtin, one could argue, the Marxist hegemony in late-1920s Russia and the necessity of filtering his work through Marxist rhetoric were just such dialogic influences; they do not make the Bakhtinian elements of the disputed texts inauthentic. And if the question is not whether Bakhtin is "responsible" for the texts but whether the texts are important in understanding Bakhtin, most scholars, including Caryl Emerson, believe the answer is an unambiguous yes.

At this point, it's apparent that the dispute over the texts is no longer a dispute about either the facts of the case or clashing ideologies. It has settled into a fundamental and perhaps irresolvable discussion over the meaning of authorship. Is the fixation of authorship a moral necessity—the only way to hold a human being responsible for his words? Or is authorship nothing but a legal fiction, an attempt to nail down what cannot be nailed down—the ceaseless dialogic ebb and flow of language?

The disputed-texts controversy might be taken to support either of these positions. Either way, it illustrates the tragedies that occur under social regimes that do not allow people to assume ownership of their own word. Bakhtin was lucky; he managed to live long enough to sign his name to a few books he was not ashamed of. It must have been quite a release, after living so long under the conditions he described in a 1943 diary entry: "In these times, it is impossible not to lie."

Matt Steinglass is a writer living in New York.

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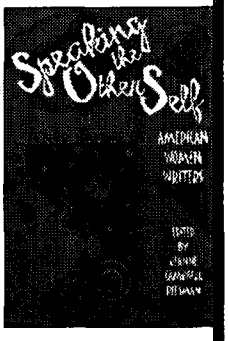

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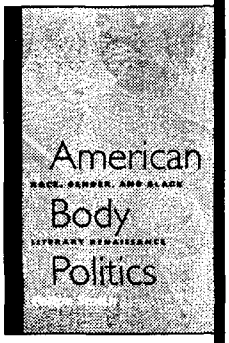

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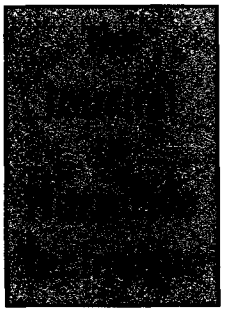

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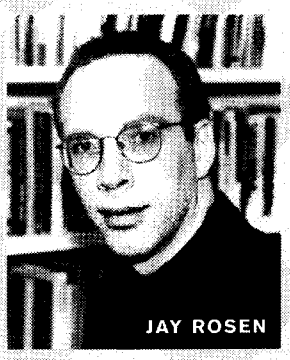

JAY ROSEN

The Public Defender

A JOURNALISM PROFESSOR'S CRUSADE TO BRING THE COMMUNITY INTO THE NEWSROOM

BY **SCOTT SHERMAN**

DURING THE 1996 ELECTIONS, FIFTEEN North Carolina newspapers and TV stations collaborated on an unusual experiment known as "Your Voice, Your Vote." The local media asked two thousand residents to list the issues they were most concerned about: taxes and spending, crime and drugs, education and financial security. With this information in hand, the coalition then interviewed each candidate—except Senator Jesse Helms, who refused to participate—and produced a series of articles comparing their responses.

Almost immediately, *The Washington Post*, *The Boston Globe*, the *Financial Times*, and other leading newspapers excoriated the endeavor, arguing that its reliance on polls to direct the coverage amounted to pandering and led to the exclusion of key issues—such as race—that didn't show up in the surveys. The campaign manager for Helms's rival, Harvey Gantt, complained that the apparently high-minded project ended up being unfair to his candidate by short-circuiting an open discussion of racial issues. (Gantt lost.) Jonathan Yardley of *The Washington Post* blasted the experiment as an attempt by the press to "control the political agenda," and Michael Kelly of *The New Yorker* slammed the project as "anti-democratic" and "dishonest." In response, *Charlotte Observer* editor Jennie Buckner retorted, in a *Washington Post* Op-Ed, that some big-city critics had not even bothered to read the actual coverage, and she claimed to be "particularly astonished by the number of journalists who seem offended by the suggestion that they might learn something valuable by listening to citizens."

The North Carolina project is the most conspicuous example so far of "public" or "civic" journalism—a communitarian-flavored movement whose intellectual architect, leading theoretician, and chief provocateur is a tireless (some would say relentless) New York University journalism professor named Jay Rosen. Rooted in small- and medium-sized newspapers, public journalism calls on the press, in Rosen's words, to jettison the role of "detached observer" and "help revive civic life and improve public dialogue."

Jeremiads about the decline of public life are routinely issued in academic and political circles, but Rosen has been unusually energetic in his response to them, having spent the last eight years promoting what media scholar Michael Schudson calls "the best-organized journalistic social movement in the history of the American press." The movement has inspired hundreds of news organizations—among them print, radio, and TV outlets—to experiment with the idea, and it has taken Rosen from Greenwich Village, where he lives and works, into scores of newsrooms from coast to coast.

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Reporters and editors, typically wary of academic language and ideas, were not always eager to listen to someone with a doctorate in media studies, but Rosen's persistence has paid off. Since 1990 he has addressed more than three thousand journalists, been interviewed by news organizations from Japan to South Africa, and garnered $1.3 million worth of foundation grants to pursue and develop the idea. Rosen also played a significant role in shaping James Fallows's influential book, *Breaking the News* (Pantheon, 1996).

The actual experiments carried out under the rubric of public journalism vary widely in style and breadth. But they all start from the premise that American public life is in lousy shape and the press has a responsibility to do something to help. Public journalists have used a wide range of techniques: town meetings, focus groups, polling, even pizza parties. In Huntington, West Virginia, *The Herald Dispatch* helped to organize task forces whose efforts eventually raised $3 million in federal funds for a ramshackle, deindustrialized region; in Norfolk, Virginia, *The Virginian-Pilot* asked political candidates to supply a "public application form," along with a résumé and letters of recommendation; in San Francisco, *The Chronicle* inserted postage-paid voter registration forms, which led to large numbers of new voters; in Spokane, Washington, *The Spokesman-Review* abolished the position of editorial-page editor and installed two "interactive" editors to help readers craft Op-Ed pieces on topics ranging from the recollections of an impassioned twenty-year-old woman on public assistance to an eighty-five-year-old man's account of life inside a nursing home.

FEW OF these folksier projects have proven as controversial as the Charlotte experiment. Yet the mere mention of public journalism draws a fierce response from some members of the media elite, who argue that the movement amounts to little more than errant boosterism and that it threatens the press's reputation as an independent watchdog. "Reporters, editors, and publishers have their hands full learning to tell it right," Max Frankel wrote in *The New York Times Magazine*. "They should leave reforms to reformers." *Washington Post* columnist Richard Harwood cautioned that "The press already has credibility problems based on the public perception that it is an arrogant, self-serving institution that more often aggravates than cures the social illnesses that afflict us. To anoint ourselves now as leaders of a new American Reformation may be a little more than the market will bear." And in *The New Yorker*, David Remnick inquired, "Why abandon the entire enterprise of informed, aggressive skepticism—even in its current state—in the hope of pleasing an imagined public? When journalists begin acting like waiters and taking orders from the public and pollsters, the results are not pretty."

Although public journalism has made only modest headway in journalism schools, some critics blame academia for the renegade ideas swirling through small-town newspapers. For Remnick, public journalism is "especially popular among ink-free journalism professors." More pointedly, *Washington Post* editor Leonard Downie—whom Rosen publicly debated in 1995—says it is a movement fueled by "academics who are risking the terrible prostitution of our profession."

ONE 1995 SURVEY FOUND THAT 45 PERCENT OF AMERICANS HAD READ A DAILY NEWSPAPER THE PREVIOUS DAY—DOWN FROM 71 PERCENT IN 1965.

ROSEN, forty-one, was born and raised in Buffalo's middle-class suburbs. His mother was a teacher who kept *Time* and *Saturday Review* on the coffee table; his father was absent from the start. At SUNY Buffalo he began his undergraduate career as a management major. "My aspirations were quite low at that time," Rosen says from his spotless office just off Washington Square Park. Tall, lanky, and filled with nervous energy, he recalls that he was "drifting into suburban life as a member of the middle-managerial class. Then one day I got angry."

His sociology instructor had distributed a Socialist Workers Party propaganda leaflet to the class. Outraged that the professor had overstepped his boundaries and violated the canons of objectivity, the young Rosen burst into the office of the school newspaper and demanded that the editors write a story about it. In the time-honored tradition of college journalism, they replied: "Why don't *you* do it?" That article led to a staff job and eventually to the editorship; a summer position as a reporter at *The Buffalo Courier-Express* followed.

Rosen, who would come to spend much of his career questioning the virtues of objectivity, soon decided that journalistic detachment wasn't for him. At the *Courier-Express*, he found that he was not especially interested in covering school boards, fires, and the minutiae of Buffalo politics. So he eventually decided to enroll in graduate school, joining NYU's Department of Media Ecology. After writing a dissertation on John Dewey, Walter Lippmann, and the relationship between the press and the public, he was hired by NYU's Department of Journalism in 1986. Around this time, he began turning out press criticism for *Tikkun*, *The Listener*, and other small publications. According to Rosen, he was soon striving to connect with the world outside Greenwich Village: "Before I started doing public journalism, I was an imitation of a hip, downtown intellectual. In other words, I thought I was cool. Why? Because I had learned how to sneer at popular culture. It's just a pose you learn as a graduate student studying the media. You learn how to be witty and ironic...in your various put-downs of Vanna White and *USA Today*."

But Rosen would soon shuck this persona for something considerably more earnest. In 1990 he met the man who would set him on his future course: Davis "Buzz" Merritt of *The Wichita Eagle*, "the original public journalist."

MERRITT was appointed editor of the *Eagle* in 1975. He had worked on newspapers in Charlotte and in Boca Raton, Florida, but his new assignment was a mixed blessing: In 1959 *Time* magazine had dubbed Wichita's papers the "bottom of the barrel." Merritt resuscitated the *Eagle*, garnering awards for writing, layout, and photography. But

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despite the laurels, readership and circulation were declining, and, worse, community problems seemed intractable. Moreover, the 1988 presidential campaign—with its charges and countercharges, contrived imagery, and endless mudslinging—convinced Merritt that he was witnessing nothing less than "a death spiral of democracy." In response, he conceived of an ambitious, perhaps even messianic, agenda for journalists: "It was...clear to me that the public couldn't change on its own, being merely a victim of the incestuous partnership of politics and the political press. Which left only us, the press, to change, to try to halt the devastating spiral."

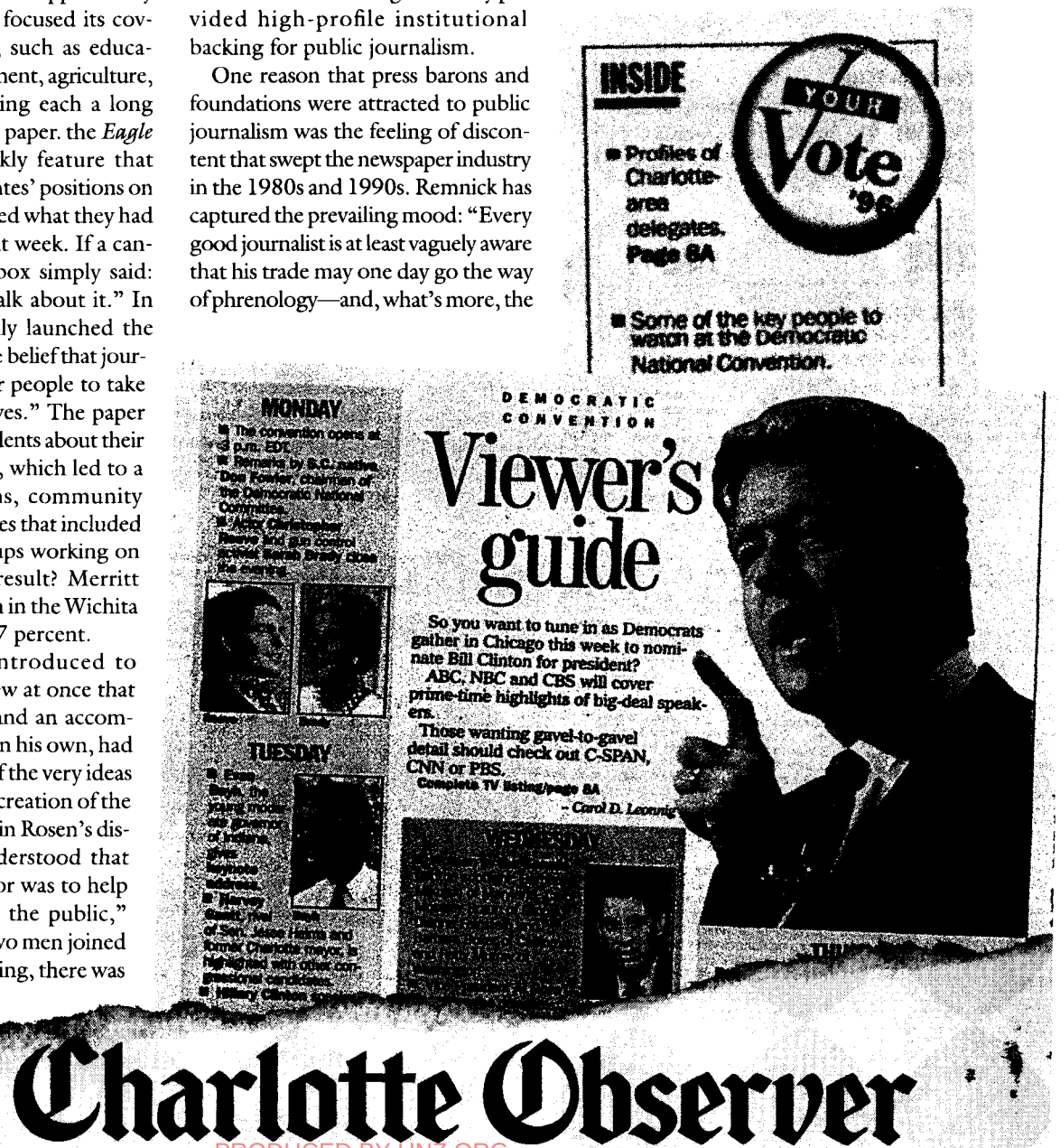
Two years later, with the Kansas gubernatorial race approaching, Merritt had a chance to reclaim the election from consultants and spin doctors. Supported by polling data, the paper focused its coverage on ten concerns, such as education, economic development, agriculture, and social services, giving each a long background piece in the paper. the *Eagle* also introduced a weekly feature that summarized the candidates' positions on core issues and then noted what they had said about each one that week. If a candidate was silent, the box simply said: "This Week: Did not talk about it." In 1992 the *Eagle* formally launched the "People's Project" in the belief that journalism could "empower people to take back control of their lives." The paper interviewed Wichita residents about their problems and concerns, which led to a series of public forums, community events, and feature articles that included phone numbers of groups working on social problems. The result? Merritt claims that volunteerism in the Wichita school system soared 37 percent.

When Rosen was introduced to Merritt in 1991, he knew at once that he had located an ally and an accomplice: Merritt, entirely on his own, had put into practice some of the very ideas about the press and the creation of the public sphere contained in Rosen's dissertation. "Merritt understood that his challenge as an editor was to help *form* as well as inform the public," Rosen has said. So the two men joined forces. From the beginning, there was a clear division of labor: Rosen supplied the vocabulary, intellectual framework, and rhetorical zest, while Merritt's forty-one years in the newspaper business, in addition to his Midwestern populist demeanor, furnished legitimacy.

IN 1993 the duo invented the term "public journalism," and the concept began to attract the support of influential figures in the newspaper industry, especially James K. Batten, the late chairman of the Knight-Ridder newspaper chain, who in 1993 helped Rosen obtain the first of two $528,000 grants from the Miami-based Knight Foundation. Other foundations—primarily The Pew Charitable Trusts and Kettering—entered the fray, as did the American Press Institute and the Poynter Institute for Media Studies. Together they provided high-profile institutional backing for public journalism.

One reason that press barons and foundations were attracted to public journalism was the feeling of discontent that swept the newspaper industry in the 1980s and 1990s. Remnick has captured the prevailing mood: "Every good journalist is at least vaguely aware that his trade may one day go the way of phrenology—and, what's more, the population will hardly protest the extinction." In laying the groundwork for a novel approach to journalism, Rosen uses a barrage of statistics to illustrate the precarious state of the newspaper and the diminishing public confidence in the press. One 1995 survey showed that 45 percent of Americans had read a daily newspaper the previous day—a number down from 71 percent in 1965. A Yankelovich poll indicated that in 1988, 50 percent of respondents had high confidence in news from newspapers, but by 1993 only 20 percent felt that way. Some polls suggest outright hostility: 71 percent of Americans, according to 1994 *Times-Mirror* data, believe that the press "gets in the way of society solving its problems."

Add to that the stunning proliferation of "infotainment," cynicism at all levels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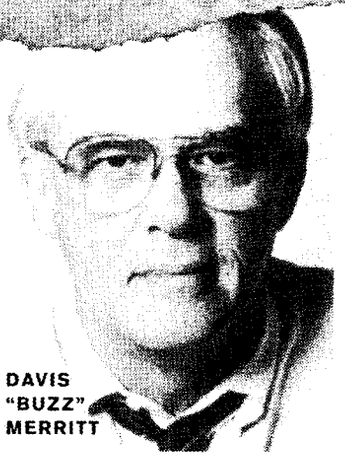

DAVIS "BUZZ" MERRITT

THE WICHITA EAGLE EDITOR BELIEVES THAT "ONLY WE, THE PRESS" CAN HOPE TO HALT A "DEATH SPIRAL OF DEMOCRACY."

of the news business, and the apparent erosion of journalistic credibility and you have some sense of the gloom that dominates industry gatherings. Though newspapers are generally a profitable business, publishers are understandably anxious about their future. Underneath it all is a pervasive fear that the newspaper itself may soon be a casualty of the computer age, as Neil Hickey argued in the November/December 1997 issue of *Columbia Journalism Review*. In "Will [Bill] Gates Crush Newspapers?," Hickey predicted that by 2001 newspapers will have lost nearly $5 billion in advertising to on-line services, a development that would cripple the industry.

FOR Rosen, public journalism offers a last chance to guarantee the profession's future. In order for such a rescue operation to succeed, however, he believes that journalists must forsake two of their most cherished principles: objectivity and adversarialism.

According to Rosen, adversarialism (or "the reporter-as-crap-detector," in his parlance) has been adopted as the identity of choice for many journalists—especially the young, the upwardly mobile, and those weaned on *The Washington Post*'s Watergate coverage. In his 1996 book, *Getting the Connections Right* (Twentieth-Century Fund), Rosen argues that adversarial reporting has engendered a peculiar form of journalistic nihilism, "a snarling and relentless cynicism—a categorical mistrust of all public figures." Beneath the "hardened realism" of the cynical reporter lies the illusion that a public "eager to see the veil stripped from politics will magically reappear each day to provide the journalist with an attentive audience." But the more likely result, Rosen insists, "is that people will ignore the news as they come to conclude that no honest leaders exist, no genuine debate can be had, no one cares much whether problems are solved, and therefore politics and journalism are a waste of time." Rosen doesn't deny that superb journalism has resulted from what he calls the "cult of toughness," nor does he believe that political coverage should be sycophantic, but he does object to reporters' masquerading as "zealous prosecutors." (As an example, he cites Tim Russert's efforts to blindside his guests on *Meet the Press*.) Quite simply, journalists must see themselves as "political actors" who have "some stake in the health of the political system."

The notion of objectivity, what he calls the "epistemology of American journalists," is another favorite target. Rosen takes pains to argue that objectivity contains much that is useful for the press—the disinterested pursuit of truth, the attempt to restrain biases, and so on. But he also laments the feelings of insularity and superiority that he believes typically accompany its invocation. "Everybody who comes at the press with a dissatisfaction, with a complaint, or even with an idea is seen by journalists as subjective," he told *The New York Times*. "One of the most insidious effects of objectivity is that it creates a world in which journalists can live without criticism, because they're the only judges of what's objective."

Starting in the 1970s, objectivity was scrutinized by communication scholars but to little effect: After all, *Journalism Quarterly* doesn't exactly circulate in newsrooms. But by arguing his case in hundreds of face-to-face conversations with working journalists, Rosen forced the media establishment to take notice. In appraising the objectivity debate, he floats what he calls a disruptive question: "Since the press is already a player in public life, what should it be playing *for*?"

In fact, when Rosen asks that question, he is careful to avoid endorsing the openly partisan journalism one might find in European newspapers (which are often directly affiliated with political parties) or in American opinion magazines, such as *The Nation* and the *National Review*. As Merritt puts it, the public journalist has "left the press box and gotten down on the field, not as a contestant but as a fair-minded participant with an open and expressed interest in the process going well." Rosen too prefers to talk about process, not politics. Like many other left-leaning advocates of "deliberative democracy," he insists his goal is not to advance any particular political agenda but rather to promote greater public deliberation.

ROSEN'S brand of deliberative democracy stems largely from the communications theorist and Columbia Journalism School professor James Carey. During his long career as dean of the College of Communication at the University of Illinois, Carey played a major role in introducing the "interpretative"

THE WICHITA EAGLE

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theories of thinkers like John Dewey, Max Weber, Lewis Mumford, Clifford Geertz, and Raymond Williams to communication, a field traditionally dominated by quantitative effects-based research. Yet Carey's work is little known outside the discipline, in part because he is an essayist (he hasn't produced a single monograph) and in part because his articles are buried in obscure academic journals. (Minnesota's recent publication of *James Carey: A Critical Reader* should add to his reputation; it is a stimulating compendium of essays by and about him.)

At its core, Carey's writing offers an overview of what he sees as the rise and fall of American journalism—a history that he closely links to the rise and fall of public life. For instance, in "The Press, Public Opinion and Public Discourse" (1995), he describes his vision of a robust American public sphere as it existed in the taverns of Colonial New England, where newspapers and pamphlets triggered heated debate among denizens and travelers. Of course, it was a world restricted by race and gender and class, but in Carey's view it was something special nevertheless:

> The public, in this phase, was not a fiction or an abstraction: a group of people sitting at home watching television or privately and invisibly reading a newspaper or numbers collected in a public opinion poll. The public was a specified social formation: a group of people, often strangers, gathered in public houses to talk, to read the news together, to dispute the meaning of events, to join political impulses to political actions.

Carey then documents the erosion of that milieu, beginning with the growth of Progressive-era journalistic professionalization, followed by the rise of expert knowledge, and finally, the consolidation of the survey research and polling industries. Modern journalism was the result, and Carey concedes that it has been "a bulwark of liberty in our time" and that "no one has come up with a better arrangement." Still, it is plagued by a near-fatal defect: It is a journalism that "justifies itself in the public's name but in which the public plays no role, except as an audience." He adds: "Journalism only makes sense in relation to the public and public life. Therefore, the fundamental problem in journalism is to reconstitute the public, to bring it back into existence."

In his search for a way out of this impasse, Carey looks to the work of John Dewey, in particular his celebrated debate with Walter Lippmann during the 1920s. Lippmann had insisted that the idea of an informed citizenry was a delusion: "They arrive in the middle of the third act and leave before the last curtain, staying just long enough to decide who is the hero and who is the villain." In response, Dewey agreed that democratic theory had erred in positing the omnicompetent citizen, but he defended the popular capacity for decision making. The problem, for Dewey, was how to create the kind of direct public interaction that could fulfill the promise of participatory democracy. But what happens when a town or a city grows to a size where face-to-face dialogue is impossible? Carey argues that it then falls to the press to foster that dialogue. In his interpretation of Dewey, "public opinion...is formed only in discussion," and, hence, "the purpose of news is not to represent and inform but to signal, tell a story and activate inquiry." He warns: "The press, by seeing its role as that of informing the public, abandons its role as an agency for carrying on the conversation in our culture."

Like Rosen, the historian and social critic Christopher Lasch was convinced by Carey's argument. In a 1990 essay "Journalism, Publicity, and the Lost Art of Argument," he put forth his own summary of Dewey's riposte to Lippmann: "Instead of dismissing direct democracy as irrelevant to modern conditions, we need to re-create it on a large scale. And from this point of view, the press serves as the equivalent of a town meeting."

A LEADING scholar who dissents from the Dewey-Carey-Lasch-Rosen line is UC-San Diego's Michael Schudson, author of *Discovering The News* (Basic, 1978), the definitive account of the triumph of journalistic objectivity.

Schudson is uneasy about some of the more grandiose statements he has heard from Rosen and Carey. "I don't think the press has ever *constituted* the public," he says, adding that today's public life may not be as utterly passive and disengaged as critics say. Moreover, he is skeptical of

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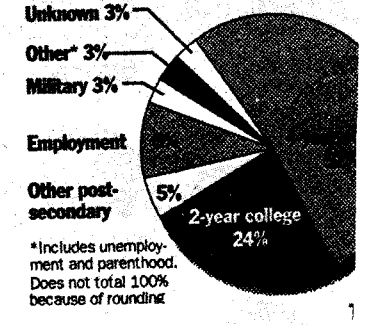

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WICHITA, USD 259	College 4-year	College 2-year	Other post-secondary	Employment	Military	Other	Unknown	su
Downtown Law Magnet	53%	3%	0%	7%	10%	27%	0%	
East High	64%	15%	9%	7%	1%	2%	3%	
Heights High	70%	12%	8%	4%	3%	1%	1%	

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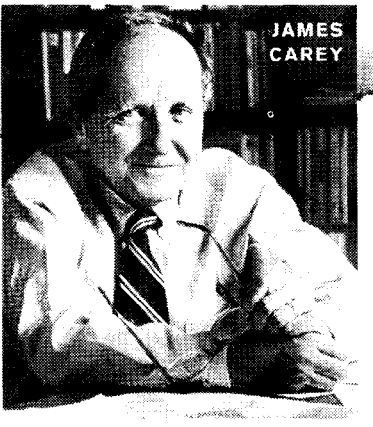
IN CAREY'S VIEW, THE RISE OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISM COINCIDED WITH THE DECLINE OF VIBRANT POLITICAL DISCUSSION IN TAVERNS AND ON THE STREETS.



Dewey's emphasis on face-to-face conversation. In an essay entitled "Why Conversation Is Not the Soul of Democracy," which appears in the December 1997 issue of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, Schudson insists that the current "romance" with conversation, which is visible all over the academic landscape, is deeply problematic. Drawing from Jane Mansbridge's research on Vermont town meetings, Schudson points out that they can not only lead to stress, social discomfort, and the reinforcement of local hierarchies, but that conversation itself is hardly egalitarian or effortless. (Other critics of the conversation model have added that public dialogue may create discord just as easily as consensus and promote hypocrisy rather than sincerity.)

In a lucid essay forthcoming in *The Politics of News* (Congressional Quarterly Press), Schudson wonders if the goals of public journalism are really compatible with one another: "What is it that public journalism is supposed to be advancing? Is it 'community'? Or is it a healthy public discourse? Or is it a well-endowed public domain? What makes public journalists believe that these things are consistent rather than at war?" And he concludes that public journalism is, in fact, a conservative reform movement with a narrow political agenda—one that is too compatible with market-oriented journalism:

> It does not propose new media accountability systems. It does not offer a citizen media review board or a National News Council. It does not recommend publicly elected publishers or editors. It does not suggest that the press be formally or even informally answerable to a governmental or community body. It does not borrow from Sweden the proposition that government should subsidize news organizations that would enlarge the diversity of viewpoints available to the reading public. It does not propose nonprofit news institutions (like PBS) or news institutions without advertising (like the reformulated *Ms.* magazine).

Still, Schudson applauds public journalism's vigorous challenge to standard media assumptions and practices—"What democratic process," he tartly asks, "led newspapers to follow local football teams with greater constancy and a richer sense of history than they follow local politics?"—and insists that it is "the most serious and most intelligent development in journalism in decades."

IN newsrooms, meanwhile, the controversy continues. Current public journalism projects, funded by Pew, target economic reconstruction: In Aberdeen, Washington, a coalition of media outlets is examining the decline of the local fishing and logging industries and will attempt to come up with remedies; in Long Beach, California, the *Press-Telegram* is doing something similar in a community ravaged by defense cutbacks.

But the current wave of experiments also provides plenty of ammunition for critics: At *The Asbury Park Press* in New Jersey, for example, "grassroots community activists and leaders have been

STEPHEN WORNOWSKI

the mirror of ideas

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meeting at the *Press* monthly," according to a recently published account by the newspaper's staffers. This raises questions: If the local newspaper doesn't keep a critical eye on community leaders, who will? And what segment of a given community is most likely to benefit from public journalism in the first place?

An upbeat 1996 Pew study of four public journalism projects—in Charlotte, Madison, San Francisco, and Binghamton—found that considerable numbers of citizens knew about and approved of the projects, but those who were likely to be moved to participate in them were already part of "the active civic core." "What remains unknown," the study concluded, "is whether civic journalism *causes* community action or being active leads people to pay attention to public journalism."

What's more, Rosen must sometimes feel that he has helped to create a monster. In a 1995 advertisement that appeared on the front page of *Editor and Publisher,* the trade magazine of the newspaper industry, the Gannett Company blared: "We believe in 'public journalism'—and have done it for years." The ad, which Rosen calls a "heated exercise in hype," hailed the efforts of various Gannett papers—one of which, *The Gazette* in Elmira, New York, had "spearheaded the drive that raised $200,000 to bring a city-owned baseball stadium up to the standard to keep the [local minor league] baseball franchise in the city." "My heart sank when I saw it," Rosen recalls. "Stadium fixing was not the idea we had floated in any form I could recognize."

ROSEN himself admits to having made plenty of mistakes, and he recounts them in the conclusion to his forthcoming book, *What Are Journalists For?* (Yale): "Turning people off by coming on too strongly, alienating potential supporters with inflammatory rhetoric, getting defensive in the face of criticism—or sounding clueless to three-quarters of [an audience]." One can add the following: his desire to have it both ways on the objectivity question; his readiness to demonize journalists (he writes in the *Carey Reader* that reporters indifferent to "democracy as a way of life" are "dangers to themselves and to the rest of us"); and his alarmist rhetoric about the "deepening ordeal" of American politics: In *Getting the Connections Right,* Rosen points to "militia members and black nationalists" who "read the papers with a savage mistrust." Nowhere in Rosen's writings does he address the issue of whether it's the duty of the press to sponsor public discussion, boost civic activity, and, as he often intones, "make public life go well"—or if that's a task better left to political parties, religious organizations, and trade unions. Meanwhile, critics point out that public journalism has thus far not been a profitable venture. Newspapers that pioneered the idea—*The Wichita Eagle,* among them—are still grappling with problems of dwindling circulation and public apathy.

But Rosen has many defenders. "Newspapers in Wichita, Charlotte, and many other cities are different now," says David Rubin, Dean of Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "One reason they are different is because of Jay Rosen." "In the end, we're going to find that Jay Rosen is one of the architects of the journalism we'll be seeing for decades to come," says Steve Smith of *The Colorado Springs Gazette.* "That's no mean feat for a nasally-voiced academic from NYU."

IN SPITE of his missteps, Rosen has fueled a vigorous discussion. Does the press have a responsibility that transcends objective journalism? What *are* journalists for? And now he is beginning to raise a related, and perhaps equally urgent, question: What are professors for?

Last year, Rosen participated in a conference on "public scholarship" sponsored by the Kettering Foundation. And in an interview published in Kettering's *Higher Education Exchange,* Rosen recently called for a new generation of "public scholars," who are to be differentiated from "public intellectuals." Public intellectuals, for Rosen, are basically mandarins, members of the avant-garde who step forward at urgent moments to enlighten the public. Public scholars, on the other hand, begin with the "realization that they don't know

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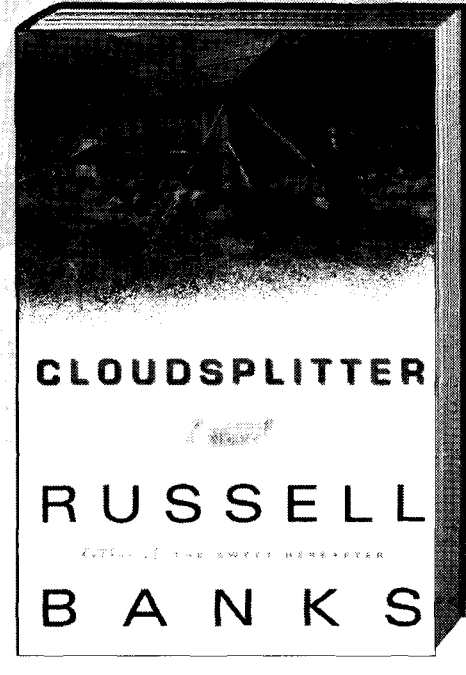

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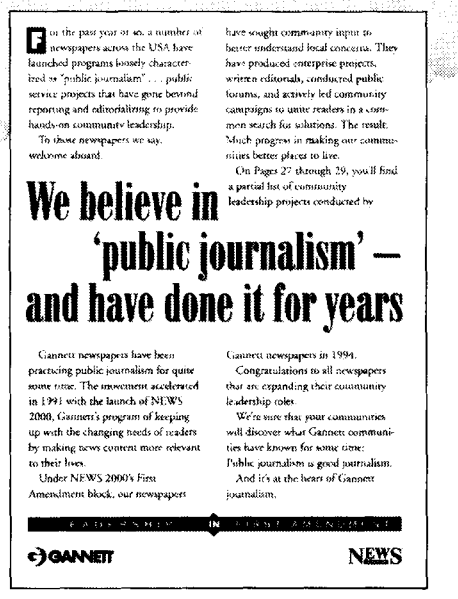
ROUTLEDGE

CRITICS ARGUE THAT THE PUBLIC JOURNALISM MOVEMENT AMOUNTS TO LITTLE MORE THAN ERRANT BOOSTERISM AND THREATENS THE PRESS'S REPUTATION AS AN INDEPENDENT WATCHDOG.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something, and the something can only be known in one way: through a process of inquiry conducted with others in public." For Rosen, public scholarship encourages academics to treat the subjects of their research as active, autonomous beings—and not just as bundles of data to be dissected and analyzed. But Rosen hasn't placed any firm limits on the idea, and that might well make some academics tremble: Must a graduate student in medieval studies hold a town meeting before choosing her dissertation topic?

In a scathing response to Rosen in *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* Kettering conference participant Alan Wolfe argued that many aspects of public scholarship are admirable but ultimately it's a "flawed concept" that conceals a political agenda. Taking issue with Rosen's Deweyan aspiration to revive the public, Wolfe noted, "There is an American public already in place, quite comfortable about making its views known via talk radio, letters to the editor and electoral activity. Asking scholars to 'enlarge public understanding'—Rosen's words—is a way of saying that scholars do not like the understandings the public already has." Let's not be surprised, Wolfe adds, if the public, or at least the conservative wing of it, remains suspicious of professors who claim to seek cooperation "in deciding what we ought to value." Most significantly, Wolfe worried that the duty to engage in public scholarship might compromise a scholar's work: "As a scholar," Wolfe concludes, "I have only one principal obligation: to my quest for understanding."

In his response, Wolfe noted that "Dewey preferred a public that did not yet exist to the one whose influence could be felt everywhere around him." The same might be said of Rosen and Carey when they speak of "forming" and "reconstituting" the public. As Wolfe suggests, such language conjures up social engineering, and is at odds with the spirit of the movement they helped establish—a movement that, at its best, points the way toward a less distant and more equitable relationship between the press and the public. It's a point Rosen must bear in mind, for the fate of public journalism will ultimately rest on how effectively its disciples can conquer the hearts and minds of an actually existing public, not an imagined one.

Scott Sherman's work has appeared in *The Nation, The Utne Reader,* and other publications. His article "Fighting Words: Adolf Reed's Crusade Against the New Black Intellectuals" appeared in the March 1997 issue of LF.

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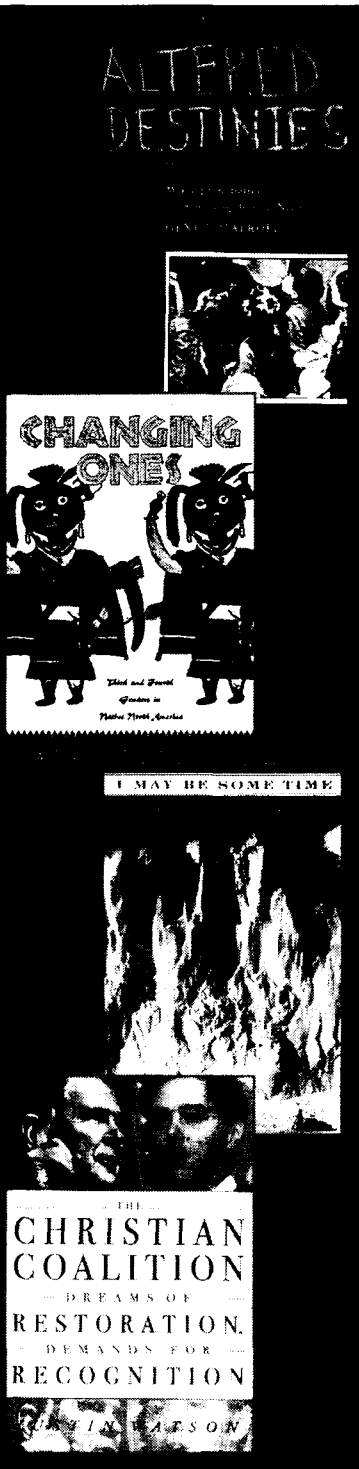

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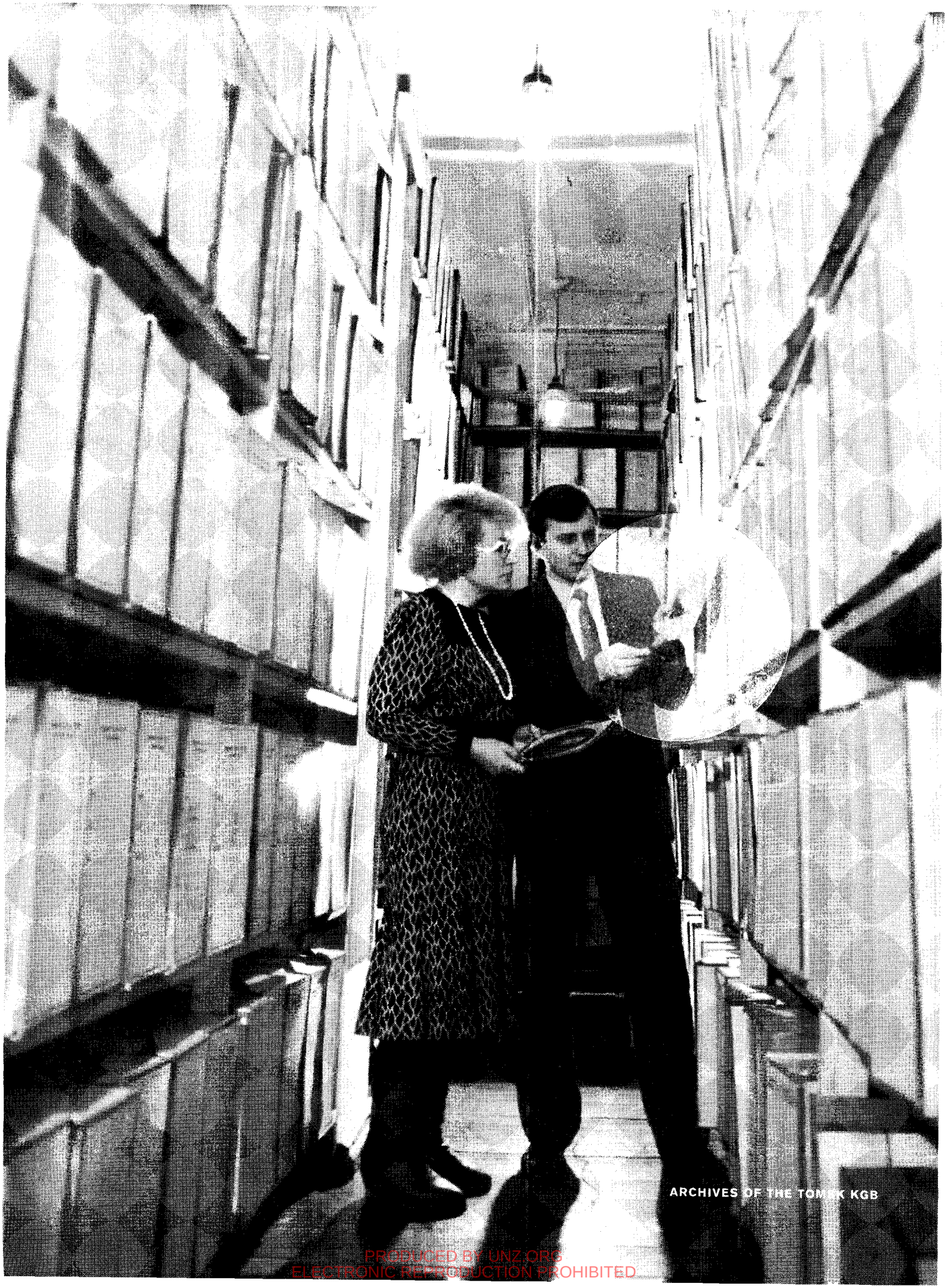

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THE ARCHIVE EATERS

A NEW GENERATION OF SCHOLARS SINKS ITS TEETH INTO THE COLD WAR'S LEFTOVERS

BY **EYAL PRESS**

ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1989, THE AMERican ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock Jr., slipped inside the Soviet Foreign Ministry in Moscow and posed a surreal question to Kremlin officials. Would it be possible, Matlock politely inquired, for the Soviet Union to dispatch troops into Romania and assist the rebels attempting to overthrow Communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu? This extraordinary appeal came two years *before* the official dissolution of the Soviet Union and flatly contradicted a half century of American outcries over the Soviet presence in Eastern Europe. Yet scholars eager to examine Matlock's request won't find anything about it in U.S. archives, which remain strictly classified. A Russian bureaucrat's vivid account of Matlock's request, however, appears in the latest bulletin of the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP), an organization that, since its founding in 1991, has unearthed countless documents as arresting and mysterious as this one.

At first glance, the CWIHP itself appears rather mysterious. To reach its offices in Washington, D.C., one must climb a steep, winding staircase to the top of the North Tower of the Smithsonian Castle, an old medieval-style fortress overlooking the Mall. There, in a cramped, dimly lit chamber, scholars are sorting through a vast trove of documents gathered from the ruins of the former Soviet empire, some detailing the deepest secrets of Communism.

For fifty years, Western scholars were denied access to this paper trail, making do with a smattering of public speeches, memoirs, and "official" biographies. Then came the liquidation of the Soviet empire—and a torrent of new information. "It suddenly became clear that you could no longer write Cold War history based only on the Western sources," says James Hershberg, a historian at George Washington University. "An unprecedented opportunity was emerging to get sources and perspectives from the other side."

Hershberg should know: From 1991 until last year, he served as the CWIHP's founding director, assuming responsibility for, among other things, publishing its ever expanding bulletin. Within a few years, this indispensable guide to the latest archival releases has mushroomed from a meager review into a four-hundred-page tome crammed with eye-catching entries—including, recently, the full transcript of a top secret 1981 meeting in Mexico City between the Cuban vice president, Carlos Rodriguez, and that consummate cold-warrior, Alexander Haig. (Straining to convince Haig that the Sandinista Revolution was not a product of Cuban meddling in Central America, Rodriguez plucked an axiom from the philosopher David Hume: "The factual appearance of 'B' following the appearance of 'A' does not signify that 'A' necessarily is the cause of the appearance of 'B.'") The CWIHP has already amassed enough material for "roughly fifteen books," estimates Hershberg. "I can't tell you how many all-nighters I spent trying to get those bulletins out," he explains with a half-pinched smile.

As one might expect, scholars have already begun sparring over what these newfound documents reveal. John Lewis Gaddis, the dean of Cold War scholars and one of the CWIHP's founders, argues in his latest book, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford), that the new discoveries starkly expose Soviet totalitarianism as the Cold War's fundamental cause. Not so, counters University of Virginia historian Melvyn Leffler, who recently argued in *Foreign Affairs* that the archival evidence is far more ambiguous—and by no means absolves Washington of responsibility.

The tussle between Gaddis and Leffler echoes the passionate quarrels that once divided orthodox American scholars of the 1950s (who blamed the Cold War on Moscow) from revisionists of the next generation (who put equal blame on Washington). Indeed, the Cold War's cessation has only slightly reduced the acidity of these debates: While Gaddis recently berated the revisionists for closing their eyes to the "odious" horrors emerging from the archives, Leffler has accused Gaddis and others of "turning the Cold War into a morality play."

Meanwhile, as old battle lines are drawn, a new generation of CWIHP scholars—including Vladislav Zubok of Russia, Chen Jian of China, and Christian Ostermann of Germany—is asking questions that challenge the assumptions of both camps. Understanding the Cold War, these scholars suggest, requires incorporating the insights of those who actually lived behind the Iron Curtain. How, they ask, were Western initiatives like the Marshall Plan received by the other side? Did factors other than Marxism—in particular, the peculiarities of Russian and Chinese culture—play a pivotal role in shaping foreign policy? And how did the Cold War look to ordinary people on the streets of Warsaw, Prague, and Budapest? In refocusing the scholarly spotlight, this new crop of historians may be turning the subject of the Cold War—at long last—into a truly international field of study.

THE ORIGINS of the Cold War International History Project date back to the initial stages of glasnost, in the mid-1980s. At that time, James Hershberg was a young Tufts University graduate student toiling away on a dissertation that explored the life and times of former Harvard president—and Manhattan Project overseer—James B. Conant. (The fruits of his research became the widely acclaimed 1993 biography *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age.*) In the fall of 1986, Hershberg received a call from his undergraduate thesis adviser, the historian Martin Sherwin, who was

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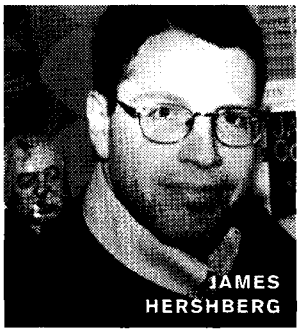
about to launch an experimental program offering jointly taught courses at Tufts and Moscow State University. Hershberg signed on as a teaching assistant and, a short while later, began accompanying Tufts students on pioneering trips to Moscow. One time, he recalls, "we had the surreal experience of showing the Soviet students *Dr. Strangelove*. There's a two-minute segment of the film in Russian where the Soviet ambassador is talking to the premier about the threat of a mistaken U.S. nuclear attack. The Russian students were in total hysterics, sharing our sense of the absurd aspects of the nuclear predicament."

While this was happening, scholars in America were also sensing that relations with their Soviet counterparts were entering a new phase. In 1988 John Gaddis, then at Ohio University, hosted a conference where—to his surprise—several young Russian scholars pointedly departed from the official Kremlin view on a number of key historical questions. "This was the first time we saw internal divisions in the Soviet delegation," recalls Gaddis. Seeking to widen these cracks in the wall, Gaddis petitioned the Wilson Center, the Smithsonian's in-house think tank, for help establishing a program that would sponsor fellowships for young Communist-bloc scholars, host conferences, and publish new materials as they became available. Together with Gaddis, Wilson Center officials solicited funds from the MacArthur Foundation; the money soon came through. Later that year, Hershberg was named director.

"I initially wanted to focus on Eastern Europe," recalls Hershberg, who assumed the archives would be most accessible there. But history would radically alter his plans. Two weeks before Hershberg assumed the job, hard-line Communists launched their August 1991 coup attempt against Mikhail Gorbachev. On August 24, the newly empowered Russian leader Boris Yeltsin excoriated the Communists and issued a decree removing the archives of the Communist Party and KGB from the control of old-line bureaucrats. During the next twelve months, as Hershberg zoomed back and forth from Moscow to Washington to meet with Russian archival officials—and as Yeltsin strategically released documents to embarrass his adversaries—Western scholars basked in the glow of what is now viewed as the "Golden Period" of Russian archival openness.

"I assumed I would have to fight constant battles to get the documents I wanted," explained Mark Kramer, a fellow at Harvard's Russian Research Center. His problem turned out to be just the opposite, namely, "how to cope with the thousands of pages of materials archive officials were quite readily bringing me." Kramer was not alone in his good fortune. In January 1993, he attended a historic conference in Moscow co-sponsored by the CWIHP and the Moscow-based Institute of Universal History. About forty papers based on archival revelations were delivered, and an array of new voices was heard, among them Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, Russian scholars at work on the early stages of a book on Soviet foreign policy. According to their 1997 study, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War* (Harvard), Moscow did not merely follow a Marxist blueprint for conquering the world, as orthodox scholars have argued, nor did the Kremlin merely react to Washington's machinations, as Western revisionists have claimed. Rather, they argue that Soviet behavior reflected a peculiar mix of Peter the Great–style messianism and nervous trepidation—an incendiary (and unpredictable) combination that made the Kremlin eager to project its power, yet terribly fearful of actual confrontation with the technologically superior West. Praising the book for situating Soviet strategy squarely in the context of Russian culture, *Foreign Policy* recently hailed it as "the most significant addition to the literature on foreign policy since the end of the Cold War."


JAMES HERSHBERG

KATHRYN WEATHERSBY

THE Moscow conference was the first of many stirring CWIHP symposia—others would follow in Prague, Budapest, and Hong Kong—but the euphoria it generated was soon tempered by more sobering developments. Some of the chaotic Russian archives, for one thing, lacked accessible catalogs, making scholars entirely dependent on the personal assistance (and bureaucratic whims) of archival officials. Kathryn Weathersby, a visiting scholar at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo who was on the cusp of making major new discoveries on the origins of the Korean War, recalls how, at this key moment, officials at the Russian Foreign Ministry archive demanded she sign a statement promising "to submit my notes at the end of each day so that they could be 'corrected.'" (Fortunately for Weathersby, the authorities never checked her portable computer, onto which she logged most of her notes.)

More important, the Golden Period proved exceedingly shortlived. A few months after the Moscow conference, officials in the Russian Security Ministry (the successor to the KGB) initiated a sudden clampdown on scholarly access, charging that hordes of foreign researchers were looting Russia's "national patrimony." Their frustration was, in part, understandable, since many Russian archivists, devastated by the disappearance of state subsidies, had begun auctioning off documents to foreign television stations, often granting them exclusive access to materials that Russians had never seen. Compounding the problem, some publishing houses—notably Crown, which shelled out $1 million for a book series to be based on exclusive access to KGB documents—struck similar deals. The CWIHP, for its part, refuses to enter these bidding wars and vows that any documents it obtains will be open to the public. But rectitude has its price. At one point, an official tauntingly asked the CWIHP, "Why should I bother to talk to you when German television will offer us $20,000 for one file?"

The main reason for the Russian backlash against openness was not greed, but embarrassment over unseemly revelations. Months after the Moscow conference, the Western press published stories on a sensational document discovered by an Australian researcher that, if authentic, meant there were substantially more

ANNIE B. HERSHBERG (ABOVE) FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY (BELOW)

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American prisoners of war in Vietnam than Hanoi had officially claimed. The document, whose accuracy is still contested, led to pointed inquiries from the Clinton administration. Defensive Russian officials soon abandoned their open-drawer policy. Some even began to suggest that certain CWIHP scholars were CIA agents in academic disguise.

The CWIHP tries to avoid such skirmishes by showing that the benefits of openness can flow both ways. "When beginning dialogue with the Lithuanians or Vietnamese," explains Hershberg, "we've always brought along lots of declassified *American* documents to show that this is a two-way street." To that end, the project works closely with the National Security Archive (NSA), which was founded in 1985 to help journalists and scholars declassify American records. While collaborating on numerous conferences with the CWIHP, the NSA has opened its doors to dozens of foreign research fellows, some of whom have returned home to promote Western standards of openness. Csaba Békés, for example, a Hungarian scholar who completed a CWIHP fellowship in 1993, now spearheads Budapest's "1956 Institute," an organization working to declassify documents.

But sometimes a smiling face isn't enough. The release of materials in the former Communist bloc remains profoundly fraught, largely because, as Tina Rosenberg poignantly illustrates in her Pulitzer Prize–winning book, *The Haunted Land* (1995), the transition to post-Communism has elicited as much of a desire to conceal history as to expose it. In Germany, for example, the archives of the former East German Socialist Union Party (SED), which disbanded shortly after the collapse of the Berlin Wall, are completely open—yet the East German Foreign Ministry archives, which many believe will shed light on West German appeasement and collaboration with the East, remain tightly wrapped under a thirty-year waiting period. While Western scholars regard such materials as crucial to filling out the historical record, in Eastern Europe and Russia their impact is often felt in far more visceral and immediate ways. "You have to understand," explains Christian Ostermann, a German historian currently working as the CWIHP's acting director, "all of these issues may be of academic interest in America. In Europe, they are of acute political importance today."

ORGANIZING A CONFERENCE ON POLISH MARTIAL LAW WAS LIKE "SOLVING A RUBIK'S CUBE," SAYS HERSHBERG. "WHENEVER ONE SIDE FELL INTO PLACE, THE OTHER SIDES WOULD OBJECT."

NOTHING illustrates this point more dramatically than the conference on Poland's martial law crisis, which the CWIHP, the NSA, and the Polish Academy of Sciences co-sponsored last fall in Jachranka, a small town outside Warsaw.

Hershberg and his fellow organizers adopted a "critical oral history" format for the symposium, juxtaposing the latest documentary evidence with recollections of actual participants. At one end of the conference table sat Marshal Viktor G. Kulikov, the once-despised Soviet commander who, throughout the 1980–81 Solidarity uprising, regularly reminded Polish officials that Soviet troops were poised to pummel the anti-Commmunist movement. Still a devout Communist, Kulikov strode into the conference decked out in full Soviet regalia. Meanwhile, next to him, veiled by his trademark dark glasses, stood General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the former Polish Communist head of state who, on December 13, 1981, somberly informed his people that he had issued an order to impose martial law. Ever since, Jaruzelski has maintained his political legitimacy—and avoided going to prison—by claiming that he did so only to stave off the Soviets, whom he feared might invade. Did Jaruzelski, in fact, act patriotically? Marshal Kulikov and the Soviets have maintained that, despite their threats, they never had any intention of invading at the time and that crushing Solidarity was a strictly Polish affair. Sixteen years after Jaruzelski's decision, in the presence of historians, former Solidarity firebrands, and Carter and Reagan administration officials (including Zbigniew Brzezinski, national security adviser under Carter), these various players gathered in a single room to air their elaborate—and, of course, irreconcilable—stories about the past.

JARUZELSKI (CENTER) WITH BREZHNEV (RIGHT), 1982

TAR: TASS/SOVFOTO

"Just organizing that conference was like trying to solve a Rubik's Cube," says Hershberg. "Whenever one side fell into place, the other sides would object because they had their own political agenda and demands." Indeed, the conference, originally scheduled for June,

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had to be delayed several months until after Polish elections, since the issue of past Communist misdeeds was being hotly debated by candidates.

The meeting's most dramatic evidence emerged from an unexpected source: General Viktor Anoshkin, a Soviet adjutant who, unbeknownst to the conference organizers, brought with him a copy of his own, never-before-seen diary, which contained detailed notes from top-level meetings that had transpired in Warsaw throughout the 1981 crisis. As the conference participants learned, on December 11, 1981, just two days before the imposition of martial law, Anoshkin's diary shows that Jaruzelski explicitly asked Moscow whether Soviet troops would back up Warsaw's effort to crush Solidarity. "We will not introduce forces," the Soviets responded. Jaruzelski's reaction, carefully recorded in the diary, reads: "This is terrible news for us.... There has been a year and a half of prattling about introducing forces—and now everything has been dropped." In other words, Jaruzelski, far from relieved that the Soviets were staying away, was severely disappointed. Two days later, the man who claims to have had no other choice ordered tanks to roll through the streets and trample Solidarity.

The disclosure sent shock waves through the conference hall. After a break in the session, a shaken Jaruzelski reportedly approached Marshal Kulikov, head bowed and face ashen. "How could you let them do this to me—in front of the Americans!" he whispered in Russian. Kulikov responded by tenderly embracing his former comrade and kissing him on the cheeks.

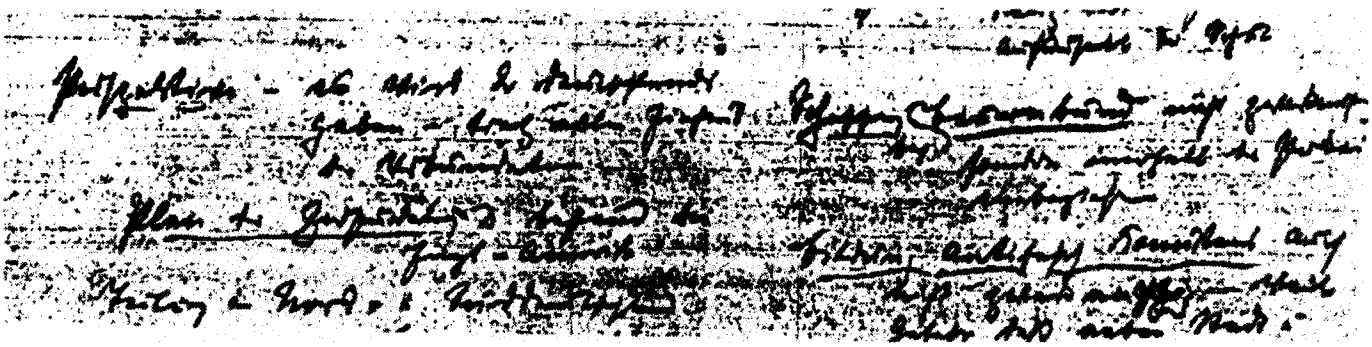
In the end, the meetings raised fresh doubts about whether Jaruzelski's decision to crush Solidarity was necessary. It also exposed the ambiguities of Warsaw's relationship with Moscow, puncturing the myth, which much of the new Cold War history is exploding, that all the important decisions during the Cold War were made at the Kremlin. Brzezinski and other U.S. observers admitted to being surprised. Even Harvard's Richard Pipes, an inveterate cold-warrior who served as Reagan's chief adviser on the Soviet Union, admitted to Hershberg and others at the conference that events in Poland "were far more complicated than I had thought at the time."

FOR ALL the bombshells unloaded at CWIHP conferences, the gatherings themselves have been equally crucial for forging an international network of scholars. "Perhaps the most important thing we've done is bring together scholars who speak different languages and work in different areas and who would otherwise be working in total isolation," reflects Hershberg. "A number of contacts and friendships have formed. We've even had our first project marriage." (In January, Vojtech Mastny, a Czech-born scholar, took the hand of Kathryn Weathersby.)

Such fraternizing can yield important scholarly rewards. Piero Gleijeses, a historian at Johns Hopkins, for example, spent several years researching a book on Cuban foreign policy in Africa, but had little luck acquiring internal Cuban records. Through the CWIHP, he got in touch with Odd Arne Westad, a Norwegian scholar halfway around the globe who had obtained a trove of Soviet documents on the same topic. Gleijeses traveled to Havana with a paper on the subject by Westad and showed it to Cuban officials, who were incensed that Soviet records depicted Havana as Moscow's submissive proxy. Goaded by Westad's claims, the Cubans promptly showered Gleijeses with hundreds of internal documents suggesting this was not the case.

Of course, the prospect of holing up in far-flung libraries to wade through messy, jumbled archives does not appeal to everyone. CWIHP senior scholar David Wolff describes himself and his colleagues as *arkhivoedy*, a Russian term meaning "archive eaters." In addition to Russian, the globe-trotting Wolff is fluent in French, German, and Chinese. "The joys of just getting these fresh archives that no one has ever seen before is pure excitement," Wolff says. "Pure juice." Even *arkhivoedy*, however, occasionally feel the strain of such work. During a tear through the Baltics last summer, Wolff confesses that at one point he turned to Hershberg and Mark Kramer—who has mastered most Eastern-bloc languages and is notorious for staying up all night translating documents while subsisting on popcorn—and asked, "What am I *doing* spending my summer with you nuts?" Later, however, the trio bumped into some Latvian computer hackers, who tipped them off about a computerized database filled with top secret intelligence information that the KGB had accidentally left behind before fleeing the Baltics. The *arkhivoedy* could feast at last.

HUNTING down documents breeds camaraderie, but interpreting them is a different matter. In the case of materials locked behind the Iron Curtain for a half century, the rush to judgment is especially tempting—yet perilous. Recently in Germany, for example, several major newspapers ran prominent stories heralding the discovery of notes from a 1945 meeting among top Soviet officials. The notes contain the proclamation, "There will be



DOCUMENT IN STALIN'S HAND, STATING THAT "THERE WILL BE TWO GERMANYS—DESPITE ALL THE UNITY AMONG THE ALLIES."

DER SPIEGEL

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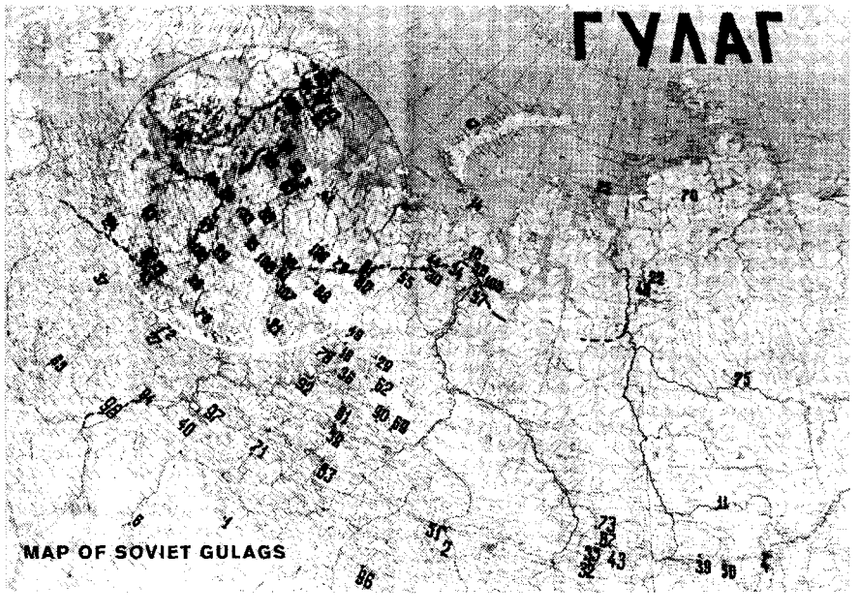

MAP OF SOVIET GULAGS

ITAR-TASS/SOVFOTO

COMMUNIST ARCHIVES MAY BE OF ACADEMIC INTEREST IN AMERICA. IN EUROPE, THEY ARE OF ACUTE POLITICAL IMPORTANCE TODAY.

two Germanys—despite all the unity among the Allies." This was proof, the papers excitedly reported, that the Soviets had planned to partition their country all along. The trouble is, as the Stanford University historian Norman Naimark explains in *The Russians in Germany* (Harvard, 1995), this interpretation is unfounded. Elsewhere in the document, the notes suggest that Stalin clearly voiced his opposition to dividing Germany at this time. The "two Germanys," Naimark concludes, likely refers to a competition between "progressive" and "reactionary" political forces that the Soviets did view as inevitable. So much for the hype.

In such cases, it's nice to have a historian on hand to clear the air. But in other places, the air has been clouded by the historians themselves. At an April 1996 gathering of scholars at Temple University, John Lewis Gaddis presented a preliminary version of the concluding chapter to *We Now Know*. As the dust settles on the collapsed Soviet empire, argued Gaddis, and as light pours in from the archives, "Stalin's centrality to the origins of the Cold War becomes quite clear." According to Gaddis, Stalin's "brutal romanticism" and the supremely totalitarian system he erected not only inflicted immense human suffering on millions—but made conflict with the United States throughout the world "unavoidable." As historians awaken to this realization, Gaddis maintains, America's valiant role in "resisting authoritarianism" will occupy a central place in the new Cold War history.

Yet when Gaddis presented these conclusions at Temple, a number of scholars in the audience vehemently disagreed. "We had all read the same evidence in the bulletins," says Hershberg, "but there was no consensus on what it all meant." Indeed, in a recent essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Melvyn Leffler contends that while the archives do reveal the brutality of the Soviet regime, they also illuminate its fundamentally cautious, defensive foreign policy. Soviet officials, he claims, "did not have preconceived plans to make Eastern Europe Communist, to support the Chinese Communists, or to wage war in Korea." While Gaddis chides revisionist scholars for their "shallow, shortsighted, and antiseptic" treatment of Soviet totalitarianism and their myopic obsession with America's Cold War blunders, Leffler disapproves of the triumphalist tone in Gaddis's reading of the evidence, warning that self-congratulation risks

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"THE JOYS OF JUST GETTING THESE FRESH ARCHIVES THAT NO ONE HAS EVER SEEN BEFORE IS PURE EXCITEMENT," WOLFF SAYS. "PURE JUICE."

obscuring U.S. actions that "contributed to the arms race and the expansion of the Cold War into the Third World."

How Leffler and Gaddis can arrive at such opposing viewpoints is explained, in part, by the richness and variety of the new material. There is, for example, ample evidence that, as Gaddis puts it, "what is emerging from the archives are stories more horrifying than most of the images put forward...by the Soviet Union's most strident critics." Stalin, for example, seems to have played a direct role in mass repressions on a larger scale than even the higher earlier estimates had posited, severely undercutting a school of revisionist Sovietology that had claimed otherwise. Among the most chilling documents to emerge is a Stalin memorandum ordering the mass execution of fifteen thousand Polish prisoners of war in the Katyn Forest in 1940—definitive proof of a breathtaking crime long suspected yet shrouded in secrecy and denial. For Gaddis, such revelations illuminate the murderous intentions of a man who "waged Cold Wars" on all fronts and could never have been trusted. Leffler, however, counters that Stalin's savagery cannot explain crucial aspects of Soviet foreign policy—and here, too, new evidence has emerged to bolster the claim. For example, Naimark's *The Russians in Germany* concludes that Stalin, far from wishing to divide Germany after World War II, in fact wished the country to remain neutral and unified, in part because he desired access to western Germany's rich mineral resources. Says Leffler: "Was all Soviet behavior pure aggression? That's a gross simplification. One has to consider the security concerns of a nation that had just experienced occupation, economic devastation, and the destruction of twenty-seven million of its people in war."

SCHOLARS invariably emphasize different pieces of evidence to illustrate their points. What's more surprising is that some important new discoveries have been cited by *both* Leffler and Gaddis as proof of their respective interpretations—which only underscores the fact that the evidence does not fully confirm either of their views. No case illustrates this more strikingly than Kathryn Weathersby's explosive new findings on the origins of the Korean War.

In the early 1990s, Weathersby began "groping through the dark" in Moscow, as she describes it, searching for new archival materials on Korea. In January 1993, she came upon her first major discovery: a 1966 report on the Korean War compiled for the Soviet Foreign Ministry. (The report was first unearthed by two Russian archivists researching a separate matter.) Written by unnamed Soviet officials, the report explicitly referred to Stalin giving "final agreement to support the plans of the [North] Koreans" to launch an attack on the South—a disclosure that, if true, shattered four decades of Soviet denials that it had ever given North Korea a green light for the southern invasion, while putting to rest the fierce debate over who actually started the war. A year later, the picture was rounded out when, during a visit to Moscow by South Korean president Kim Young Sam, Boris Yeltsin handed Kim hundreds of previously classified Soviet documents on the Korean War that reveal that, in early 1950, Soviet and North Korean officials together planned an offensive against South Korea.

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At first glance, Weathersby's findings would seem to blow a hole through a hulking body of revisionist scholarship on the subject. In recent years, a rich array of work on Korea, including a monumental two-volume account by University of Chicago historian Bruce Cumings, has cast considerable doubt on the traditional view that the Korean War was a simple matter of Communist aggression overseen and orchestrated by Moscow. The revisionists counter that the Korean War was primarily a civil war, one preceded by a disastrous American military intervention, beginning in 1945. In this view, the Americans are blamed for undermining a popular left-leaning government, based in Seoul, that represented Korea's best hope for peaceful unification. "No one and everyone" was to blame for the war's outbreak, argues Cumings in his detailed and illuminating account, which documents a chain of border raids and provocations on both sides well before 1950.

Weathersby agrees that the Korean War had much to do with internal tensions. But, she adds, "I think it's erroneous to argue that the war would have happened without Stalin's approval.... The revisionists downplay the Soviet role. The documents are clear about how the decision was made." In a recent heated exchange between Weathersby and Cumings in a CWIHP bulletin, Cumings stubbornly maintains that historians should wait until documents are released in North Korea and China before submitting any final judgments. Weathersby won't have it: The question of who started the war, she writes, has already "been resolved."

Orthodox scholars have embraced Weathersby's conclusions. Gaddis, for example, touts her findings in *We Now Know*, claiming they conclusively undermine revisionist speculation that the North Koreans and Soviets were somehow "maneuvered" into attacking South Korea so that Washington could justify an immense boost in U.S. military spending (which tripled after the United States intervened).

A point scored, it would seem, by the traditionalist camp. And yet, despite all of this, Weathersby's findings by no means hew to a strictly orthodox perspective. In fact, in a 1993 article for the CWIHP bulletin, she notes that although Stalin approved the launching of the war, he did

关于决定派军队入朝作战给斯大林的电报

（一九五〇年十月二日）

（一）我们决定用志愿军名义派一部分军队至朝鲜境内和美国及其走狗李承晚(1)的军队作战，援助朝鲜同志。我们认为这样做是必要的。因为如果让整个朝鲜被美国人占去了，朝鲜革命力量受到根本的失败，则美国侵略者将更为猖獗，于整个东方都是不利的。

（二）我们认为既然决定出动中国军队到朝鲜和美国人作战，第一，就要能解决问题，即要准备在朝鲜境内歼灭和驱逐美国及其他国家的侵略军；第二，既然中国军队在朝鲜境内和美国军队打起来（虽然我们用的是志愿军名义），就要准备美国宣布和中国进入战争状态，就要准备美国至少可能使用其空军轰炸中国许多大城市及工业基地，使用其海军攻击沿海地带。

（三）这两个问题中，首先的问题是中国的军队能否在朝鲜境内歼灭美国军队，有效地解决朝鲜问题。只要我军能在朝境内歼灭美国军队，主要地是歼灭其第八军（美国的一个有战斗力的老军），则第二个问题（美国和中国宣战）的

MAO'S OCTOBER 1950 TELEGRAM TO STALIN

so only "after persistent appeals (48 telegrams!)" from North Korea's Kim Il Sung and "only because he calculated it would *not* involve military conflict with the United States." In other words, what comes across in the documents, says Weathersby, "is a tremendous appreciation for the vulnerability and weakness of the Soviet Union.... The orthodox scholars see Korea as a probe by Stalin before going further to Turkey or West Germany. There's absolutely no evidence for that. He actually saw this as security against a renewed Japanese threat...and was deeply reluctant." In his essay in *Foreign Affairs*, Leffler proceeds to weave Weathersby's analysis of Stalin's motivations into the broader tapestry of his own argument about Soviet caution and insecurity—exactly the opposite conclusion that Gaddis extracts from the same evidence.

FOR Weathersby, the lesson is that the new archival evidence throws into question both orthodox and revisionist assumptions. "It makes the old camps seem less relevant," she explains. "The old debate took place in a vacuum—it revolved around America. As we get deeper and deeper into the archives, the questions will become much more subtle and refined."

The questions will also, invariably, begin to revolve around whole new subjects. Since so many of the scholars now digging through the archives themselves grew up

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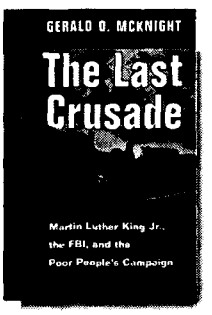

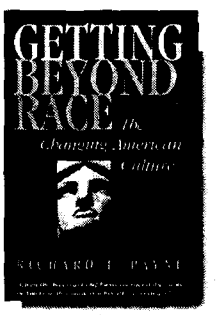

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MAO ZEDONG'S MANUSCRIPTS AFTER THE FOUNDING OF THE REPUBLIC, CENTRAL DOCUMENTATION PRESS

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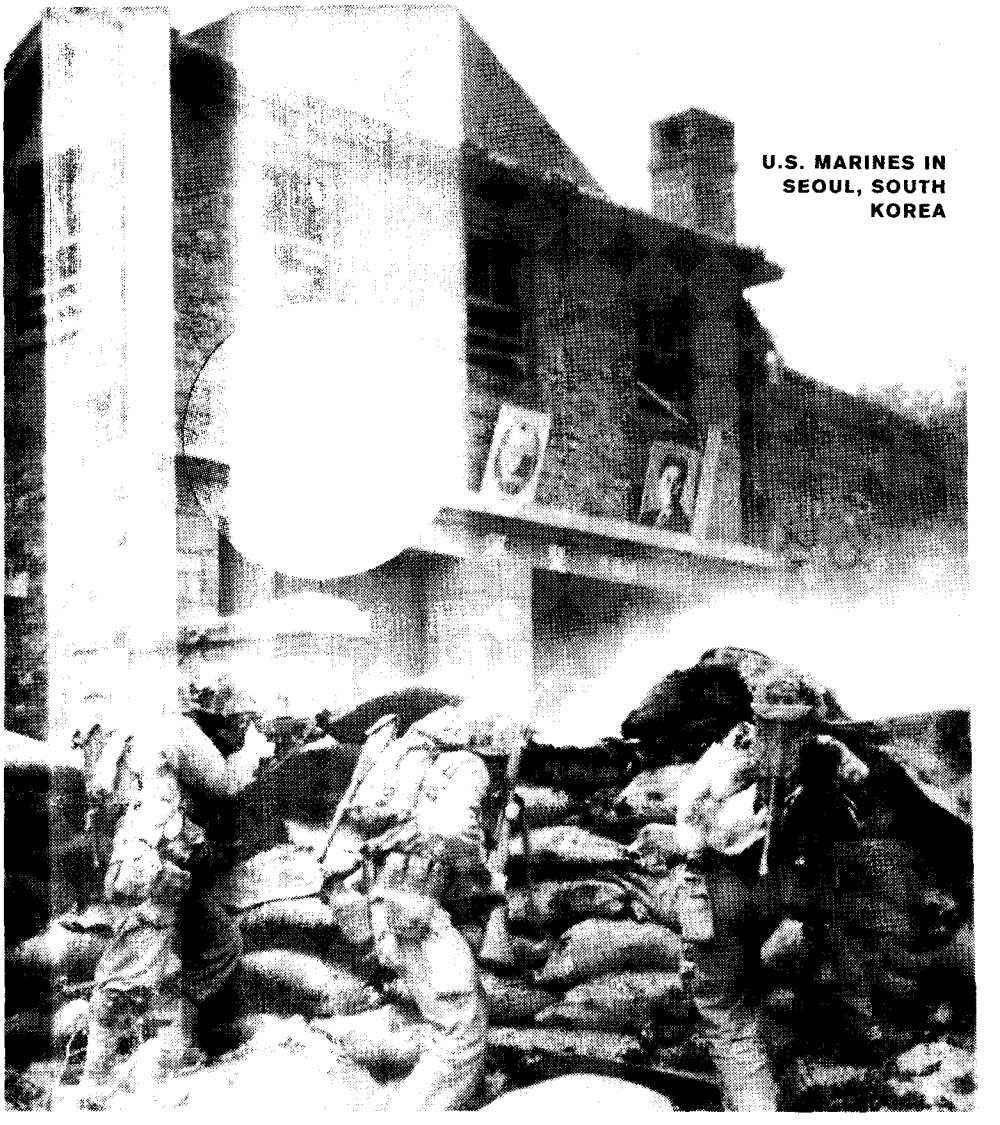
under Communist regimes, their work is, for one thing, bound to deal in a more nuanced fashion with tensions and conflicts *within* the Communist world—which in many Western accounts has been painted in broad, monochromatic strokes, as though all Communists looked and thought alike. Pawel Machewicz, a thirty-two-year-old Polish historian who completed a CWIHP fellowship in 1994, has published a social history of the 1956 anti-Soviet uprisings in Poland. Basing his account on the new archival evidence, Machewicz examines the conflict not through the familiar lens of East-West superpower conflict but from the perspective of protesters and grassroots organizers on Poland's streets—providing, in the process, a class analysis of the supposedly classless Stalinist system. The new Cold War history, it seems, will be written not just from the other side—but from the bottom up as well.

"The new scholarship is revealing the enormous complexity and subtlety of Communist relations," explains Chen Jian, a Chinese-born scholar now at Southern Illinois University and the author of *China's Road to the Korean War* (Columbia, 1994). In his book, which is based on an unprecedented range of Chinese sources, Jian pointedly distinguishes his approach from earlier "American-centered" scholarship that "viewed China's entrance into the Korean War as a reflection of a well-coordinated Communist plot...under the control of Moscow." Chinese culture and psychology, he contends—in particular, the desire to restore the Chinese "Central Kingdom" to its glory days—profoundly shaped Mao's decision to enter the Korean War. Moreover, he maintains, whereas some scholars have portrayed Mao and Stalin as birds of a feather, their relationship was in fact deeply charged and complex.

Not as complex as the archival record itself, however. Consider the following example: Ten years ago, a cable from Mao to Stalin, dated October 2, 1950, was published in an official Chinese document marked for internal use only. (Word soon dribbled out to the West.) In the telegram, the Chinese ruler informs his Soviet comrade that China is ready to enter the Korean War: "We are prepared to annihilate the invaders from the United States," crows the swaggering chairman. Until the release of this cable, historians had known only that, after U.S. troops crossed the 38th parallel into North Korea on September 30, China had issued continuous warnings to the United States not to provoke it into entering the war. The Truman administration ignored these warnings and marched U.S. forces directly toward China's border, at which point China launched a massive counteroffensive, turning Korea into a prolonged three-year conflagration. Did America's reckless push to the Chinese border force China reluctantly to declare war? Or were the Chinese planning on war from the moment that U.S. troops entered North Korean territory? The October cable to Stalin seemed to confirm the latter view, and from the moment of its appearance, scholars treated it as a major revelation.



U.S. MARINES IN SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA

FC \ \TH E NEW ARCHIVAL EV E \ NTO QUESTION BC TH RTH DOX AND REVISIONIST AS SUMPTIONS ABOUT THE KOREAN WAR.

But was it? In 1995, after obtaining a collection of Russian archival documents, James Hershberg and colleagues at the CWIHP discovered a stark discrepancy in the Soviet account of the October 2 communication. According to Soviet records, Mao sent a message that day expressing his firm *reluctance* to enter the war. "This will provoke an open conflict between the USA and China," worried Mao, "as a consequence of which the Soviet Union can also be dragged into war." To which an irate Stalin thundered, "Then let it be waged now!"

So what gives? Is the October 2 telegram in the Chinese archives a fake? Or is the Soviet account inaccurate?

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A scholarly uproar ensued. To resolve it, Chen Jian traveled to Beijing and asked to check the authenticity of the Chinese cable himself. What Jian learned is that, while the Chinese cable was indeed in Mao's handwriting, it lacked an office staff signature indicating when it had been dispatched. The cable, it seems, was drafted but never sent. To some historians, this raises new questions about America's responsibility for provoking the Chinese. Chen Jian, for his part, believes that China would have intervened regardless. He bases this judgment on...*other* archival evidence.

THE DETAILS of all this are enough to make even an archivist's head spin, but the incident also brings to mind a larger, more significant matter once raised by E.H. Carr. Historians, Carr cautioned thirty-five years ago, must strain to resist "the fetishism of documents"—that blinding affliction that spread amid the nineteenth century's equally seductive "fetishism of facts." Documents, warned Carr, "were the Ark of the Covenant in the temple of facts." He continued:

> The reverent historian approached them with bowed head and spoke of them in awed tones. If you find it in the documents, it is so. But what, when we get down to it, do these documents...tell us? No document can tell us more than what the author of the document thought...or perhaps only what he wanted others to think he thought, or even only what he himself thought he thought.

The point is not, of course, that documents are meaningless but that they can blind those who reflexively treat them like the sacred truth, leading to work that is archivally original and theoretically naive. As the flood of material from enemy archives laps onto the shores of academia, the challenge, it seems, will be not merely to sort, translate, and publish new documents, and not merely to revel in their significance, but to keep them in perspective, assess what's still missing and—most importantly perhaps—continue to insist on debating, rather than merely invoking, their significance.

The last of these injunctions is almost certain to be met by Cold War scholars, whose robust disagreements show no signs of abating. CWIHP is, meanwhile, ambitiously expanding its agenda—planning conferences on the revolutions of 1989, launching a special project on Stalin's foreign policy—but in a way that suggests a humble awareness of the immensity of the task.

"We've just scratched the surface," concedes Christian Ostermann. "Yes, we know a lot about certain key events, like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary. But the years in between the crises remain a gray zone." In particular, he adds, while scholars have unearthed a vast mountain of documents on diplomatic affairs, they've barely begun digging into the rich veins of social and cultural history. "We've gathered almost nothing on the social and economic history of the Cold War. But the material is so rich. Take the spread of 'blue-jean culture' among East German youth: In the 1950s, the East German politburo wrote up anxious reports about the threat posed by denim! Diplomatic scholars love to read transcripts of Kremlin meetings, but when it comes down to it, pop culture—blue jeans, television, McDonald's—had an explosive impact."

Ostermann pauses. "When you think about how much is out there, you realize that this whole project has just begun."

Eyal Press has written for *The Nation* and other publications. His article, "The Free Trade Faith," appeared in the December/January 1998 issue.

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JACQUES LANGEVIN/SYGMA

FRENCH FEMINISTS GET POLITICAL— AND FROM THE PARLIAMENT TO THE PRONOUN, THE REPUBLIC WILL NEVER BE THE SAME.

BY **EMILY EAKIN**

THIS WINTER, AS NEWS OF A WHITE HOUSE sex scandal threatened to bring down the president of the United States, the French government was busy defusing a gender crisis of its own—one as peculiarly French as the hue and cry over Bill Clinton's alleged dalliance with Monica Lewinsky was distinctively American. In a letter addressed to President Jacques Chirac and published in *Le Figaro* in January, three members of the illustrious Académie Française described "a matter at the highest levels of the State constituting an assault on the French language." The offense? "Certain women in your administration have decided to call themselves '*Madame la Ministre,*'" they wrote. "However, the ability to modify French grammar and usage at will does not appear to fall under the ministers' jurisdiction."

To these outraged academicians, the substitution of the feminine article *la* before the male noun *ministre* was an affront not only to the French language but also to the French republic's most cherished ideal: universalism, the absolute equality of all citizens in the eyes of the state. Already battered from decades of Anglo-American linguistic incursions and a series of failed attempts to get the French populace to use words like *chien chaud* and *baladeur* for hot dog and Walkman, the self-appointed guardians of the national tongue found themselves, in the affair of *Madame la Ministre,* confronting the ultimate act of treason—betrayal of the national creed from within their own borders.

Why did these female officials feel the need to commit a "grammatical absurdity" to make their political presence felt? The answer, fumed the academicians, was *parité.* Since 1992, when the word first entered French public consciousness—initially in the form of a book-length polemic titled *Au pouvoir citoyennes! Liberté, égalité, parité*—the word *parité* has come to stand for an unlikely new movement: a loosely organized campaign on the part of feminist politicians and scholars to bring French women into positions of power in numbers equal to men. At their most radical, the *paritaires* seek a law requiring that precisely half of all political positions be occupied by women—even if this would mean altering the constitution. (The annulment by the

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French Constitutional Council of a 1982 law proposing gender quotas on municipal electoral lists has convinced the *paritaires* that, under the current constitution, gender legislation is legally untenable.) "Parity between the sexes," declared the movement's manifesto, published in *Le Monde* in 1993, "is as necessary to the realization of democracy as the separation of powers and universal suffrage. Parity should be written into the law and the electoral process should be adapted to permit its application."

AFTER five years of increasingly high-profile militating, the *paritaires* have yet to achieve this goal. They have managed, however, to put the entire French power elite—including the normally aloof Académie Française—on the defensive. Why this should be so may strike Americans as odd. After all, isn't France the birthplace of radical feminism? Such, at least is the received wisdom in American colleges and universities, where Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is taught in almost every intro class on feminist theory, and the work of Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray is as familiar as that of Derrida and Lacan.

Less widely publicized, however, is the fact that as a political force French feminism has surprisingly few victories to show for itself back home. French women won the vote only in 1944 (women in India and Turkey beat them to the punch), and despite more than fifty years of participation in the political process, women have never held more than 6 percent of elected offices at any given time. Just a year ago, there were fewer women in the French parliament than there had been in 1945. This situation has caused the French government considerable embarrassment and allowed the French press to make some astounding statements: "Of the world's democracies, France is by a long shot the one that most mistreats its women," observed the weekly *L'Express* not long ago.

But it is not the misogyny of French politics—about which everyone agrees—that has sent French politicians and intellectuals into a metaphysical tailspin. Rather, they are inflamed by the idea of tampering with their nation's founding principles in order to solve the problem. What was the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen if not a ringing endorsement of the natural and inviolable equality of all individuals? And wouldn't a parity law only serve to undermine this notion by stipulating that men and women are not politically interchangeable? Why would women want to achieve power by stressing their difference from men? Isn't that regressive? What is parity about anyway? Female essentialism? Affirmative action? Where will it end? Will gays, Jews, and Muslims want to claim their right to parity, too—a minority stakes law?

As the national debate over parity unfolded, feminist scholars found themselves particularly well positioned to address these questions. So while the *paritaires* began their bid for public attention—first a demonstration on the steps of what they pointedly referred to as the *"assemblée natiomâle"* in April 1993, then, seven months later, a manifesto in *Le Monde* calling for a parity law—academics, including the historians Françoise Gaspard and Mona Ozouf, the philosophers Geneviève Fraisse and Blandine Kriegel, and the sociologist Christine Delphy, took up the movement's underlying philosophy and historical roots.

"OF THE WORLD'S DEMOCRACIES, FRANCE IS BY A LONG SHOT THE ONE THAT MOST MISTREATS ITS WOMEN," OBSERVED L'EXPRESS.

Both the proponents and opponents of parity make their cases through appeals to the two-hundred-year-old French republican tradition. But here, any similarity between them ends. Calling contemporary France an "unfinished democracy," the *paritaires* argue that gender equity in all spheres—including politics—is part and parcel of the universalist guarantee. Women, they point out, make up one-half of the universal subject: A parity law merely makes that fact explicit and inviolable. "There is only one way to guarantee the sovereignty of the people and to establish a democratic citizenry: codifying the principle of gender parity in representation," wrote Blandine Kriegel in 1993. "In time, this will force the remaining anti-democratic elements out of power."

Nonsense, counter the foes of parity. The beauty of French universalism, they argue, is that it makes differences among individuals—including sexual difference—irrelevant in the political realm. A parity law, they believe, would turn universalism into particularism, opening the door for all kinds of American-style identity politics and hopelessly diminishing the French republican ideal.

Perhaps not unsurprisingly, some of the fiercest criticism of parity has come from feminists themselves. Most prominent among them is Elisabeth Badinter, a lecturer at the Ecole Polytechnique, and the author of several books on gender politics, including *XY: On Masculine Identity* (Columbia, 1997). Lest anyone doubt her feminist allegiances, Badinter began her attack in *Le Monde* by asking "Who wouldn't find the marginalization of women in national representation scandalously absurd?" But her tone turned quickly stern: "If there is unanimity in the diagnosis of evil, there are fundamental differences of opinion over remedies." Parity legislation sounds very nice, she wrote, but it would deal a mortal blow to the secular and universalist French republic. Other communities would want their parity law, too, she predicted: "For example, there aren't as many Muslim senators and deputies compared to Jews."

Not only does the parity movement flirt dangerously with the essentialist view that only women can represent women,

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Badinter argued, but its tactics are deeply humiliating. "Eternal minors, eternal victims," she complained. "Are we so handicapped that we must be imposed on the public by constitutional decree?"

Implicit in Badinter's argument was the idea that parity wasn't French at all. Parity, she wrote, was an intrinsically foreign notion, an attempt to "impose the quota-based communitarian democracy of the United States." Although American feminism—even during the heyday of ERA—has never made a demand for parity in Congress, the association was strategic. By suggesting that parity was an American import, its critics appealed to a popular conception of the United States as a violent and chaotic country riven by disputes among warring tribes—men and women, blacks and whites, rich, poor.

A more extreme version of this anti-American brand of French feminism appears in the work of Mona Ozouf, a historian at the Centre National de Recherche Scientifique. Although it does not invoke the parity movement, her 1995 "Essay on French Singularity" is a furious rebuke to women who would alter the principles and policies of French republicanism. Looking back to the French Revolution, and its philosophical inspiration, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, she argues that this tradition has not been so unkind to women. After all, she points out, the Revolution abolished primogeniture in favor of laws that allowed the distribution of inheritance to children of either sex and increased wives' power in marriage. And if Rousseau's work gave birth to a republic in which, during its first 150 years, the only legal citizens were men, why, that was not because Rousseau thought women less capable. On the contrary, he believed them to be unparalleled administrators of the domestic sphere and essential to the smooth functioning of the body politic. "When women reign over private life," writes Ozouf about the post-Revolutionary period, "men can return to civic life, as required in a republic. But men are not born citizens. Boys must be prepared for their public role, and that is women's task."

In Ozouf's account, French women were never subjugated—just segregated, endowed with separate but genuinely equal rights. And it is this more or less equitable division of the Republic into gendered spheres (public and private) that explains the belated emergence of feminism as a political force in France compared to other countries. Because French women share a "national certainty about universality," she writes, they do not stake a claim to power on their difference from men. "American feminism argues without embarrassment that human universality has been annexed by men," she concludes. "French feminism does not reach that point, since it is itself universalist.... [French women] recoil at the idea, obscurantist in their view, that a philosophy could dwell within breastfeeding, a profound wisdom in menstrual periods. They do not cling to the process of becoming women.... In short, they demand their rights not as *women* but as *individuals.*"

IS PARITÉ A MISGUIDED ATTEMPT TO INTRODUCE AMERICAN-STYLE PARTICULARISM INTO FRANCE?

Following Ozouf's logic, one might be tempted to conclude that the political timidity of French feminism is testimony to the overwhelming success of the French democratic project. Differences—sexual, racial, religious—fade away under the banner of a triumphant French universalism. From this perspective, the parity movement appears hopelessly regressive, an attempt to pollute the Republic's glorious constitutional ideal with a misguided, American-style particularism.

BUT the politicians themselves weren't listening to the anti-*paritaires.* Though they hesitated to write *parité* into the constitution, they did rush to appoint more women to office. Forming his first government in June 1995, the Gaullist Prime Minister Alain Juppé came up with a record-breaking twelve female appointees. Immediately, however, there were problems. Inexperienced and unknown, the women were christened *les juppettes* (a play on Juppé's name and on *jupe,* the French word for skirt) and written off as mere window dressing. Five and a half months later, eight of the women were gone—casualties, Juppé claimed, of "government retrenchment."

News of this debacle reverberated through the highest corridors of power. And by early 1996, the idea of a parity law had picked up support from mainstream politicians. That June, ten female politicians, among them the former Socialist prime minister Edith Cresson, and the centrist Simone Veil, published their own manifesto in *L'Express.* Calling for the government and political parties voluntarily to embrace parity, this manifesto was more moderate than its predecessor, though it, too, affirmed its support for legal action. "If it proves necessary to modify the constitution to introduce affirmative action measures, then we are for it," the politicians declared. In interviews with *L'Express*, Alain Juppé (then still prime minister) and Lionel Jospin (then leader of the opposition Socialist Party) affirmed their support for parity legislation, as did, in national polls, an overwhelming 71 percent of the French public.

Even as the anti-*paritaires* feminists failed to find much favor in France, their arguments raised hackles on this side of the Atlantic. Angry at the way American feminism had been pressed into service—in grossly caricatured form—to discredit the parity movement, Joan Scott, a historian at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, fought back with an essay in the November/December 1997 issue of *New Left Review.* "Despite the venomous denunciations of some of its critics," she wrote, "parity has opened a new conversation about the future of French politics and the universalist premises upon which its republicanism has been based. In the long run, raising the spectre of American multiculturalism as a way of silencing debate or delegitimizing French feminists will not work."

For Scott, parity was not only distinctly French, it was the latest installment of a French feminist political project whose roots date to the Revolution. Parity per-

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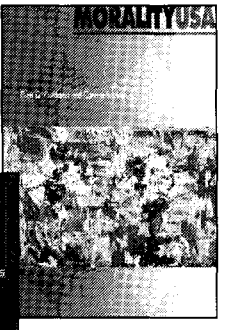

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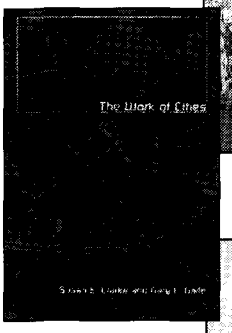

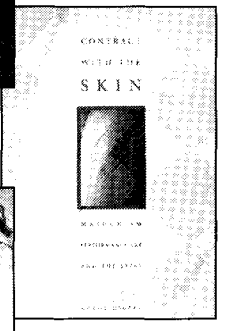

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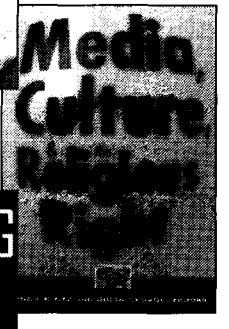

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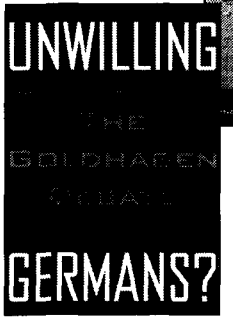

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"EVEN THE PARITAIRES DON'T THINK A 50 PERCENT LAW IS A REALISTIC GOAL," SAYS JOAN SCOTT. "BUT IT'S A TERRIFIC POLITICAL STRATEGY."

fectly embodies the insoluble paradox that Scott, in her most recent book, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Harvard, 1996), describes as "the constitutive condition of feminism as a political movement." As Scott puts it, the feminist movement "was a protest against women's political exclusion; its goal was to eliminate 'sexual difference' in politics." But, she adds, "to the extent that it acted for 'women,' feminism produced the 'sexual difference' it sought to eliminate."

Her thesis is that this paradox placed women in an impossible but not wholly unproductive bind. The feminist legacy, is to expose the contradictions inherent in any attempt to embrace *both* the abstract individual (the citizen) and sexual difference (men and women). Laws predicated on both universalism and sexual difference—including, specifically, the legal codes of the first three French republics which refused to extend citizenship rights to women—are bound to provoke debate since the assumptions underlying them are fundamentally at odds.

Of course, the same contradictions can be found in the arguments of the *paritaires*, where you find statements such as "affirmative action is a universalist philosophy" and "unlike quotas, parity is not discriminatory." Still, Scott supports the parity movement. "Even the *paritaires* don't think a 50 percent law is a realistic goal," she says. "They have called it 'a bit utopian.' But it's a terrific political strategy. When you're faced with these paradoxical situations involving the universal and the particular, you're not going to be able to resolve them. The *paritaires* are fully aware of that. But parity has opened up the discussion in strategic ways. The questions of equality, difference, and republicanism are now on the table."

INDEED, they are. When the academicians—or, as they are popularly known, *les immortels* (the immortals)—tried to make the universalist case for the phrase *Madame le ministre*, their logic immediately was assailed. Even *Le Monde*, normally too high-minded to engage in fisticuffs, let loose the next day with an editorial mocking the immortals' presumption. "Not only are there women ministers, but, as if that weren't enough, they want the fact to be known!" wrote the paper of record. Four days later, Josette Rey-Debove, an executive editor of *Le Robert* dictionaries responded with a devastating attack on the academicians' knowledge of French grammar. (In 95 percent of cases, she wrote, French nouns in the singular may be—and are—adapted to accommodate either gender.) And on January 20, two more scathing editorials appeared, including one by the deputy in charge of women's rights, the philosopher Geneviève Fraisse. "Power in France is masculine," she declared. But at least, she pointed out, "at the end of this century, the French language is feminizing words." Since the French seem averse to the idea of war between the sexes, she added, what simpler solution than to go forward and legislate equality?

Curiously, for all the philosophical debate and righteous fanfare, few feminists are talking much about the material advantages of having women in power. True, some *paritaires* have alluded to Scandinavia and Holland, where, thanks to the voluntary parity measures of major political parties, more than 30 percent of elected offices are currently held by women. But the debate is not over how women's lives—or men's lives, for that matter—would change. Perhaps the reticence of the French *paritaires* on this point stems from a fear of appearing overly essentialist. No one, apparently, wants to suggest that only women can represent women's interests or that what is important for women isn't important for the Republic as a whole. (Actual essentialists like Cixous and Irigaray would consider parity a form of selling out; to them, the entire Republic is an irreparably masculine conceit.) But this silence about *parité*'s real-life consequences may leave the movement all the more vulnerable to critics. "I am not convinced that a massive female presence in the Assembly in 1998 will change my life as a woman," remarked Badinter early last year. "But I am sure that a parity imposed by defacing the constitution will be a blow to my life as a citizen! Once we let particularism into the definition of citizenship, then we will be reduced to a sinister cohabitation in our separate ghettos."

Will the *paritaires* take a break from the metaphysics to tell the struggling single mother in Toulouse how having 288 women in parliament will improve her life? Perhaps, in the end, they won't have to. With the Socialist leader Lionel Jospin as prime minister, parity now has a better chance than ever before at becoming a reality—albeit an informal one. Last spring's elections, which brought Jospin to power, also brought an unprecedented number of women (9.1 percent) into parliament. An outspoken advocate of parity, Jospin has quietly encouraged women's political presence while steering clear of a constitutional amendment or a national referendum on the issue. Parity, he explains, shrewdly hewing to the universalist line, is a self-evident right: "It reflects the natural mixedness of the human species." His cabinet includes four women (out of fourteen), and his party's candidate lists for this June's regional elections are 40 percent female. In February, Jospin unveiled legislation that would prohibit politicians from holding more than one office at a time. Although the press coverage made no mention of the *paritaires*, they have long been seeking such a reform. When one man can no longer be mayor of Bordeaux, a state senator, *and* a delegate to the European parliament, there will be more opportunities for women to gain a foothold.

Unofficial parity has a couple of advantages. It allows the French to avoid the impossible: reconciling gender and universalism as formal policies. And it should make many feminists happy. But it will not come without some sacrifices. In *Le Monde*, for example, *Madame la Ministre* has already become standard usage.

Emily Eakin is a senior editor of *Lingua Franca*.

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CONFERENCES

WHOSE FREUD?

The Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University announces "Whose Freud: The Place of Psychoanalysis in Contemporary Culture." Participants: Leo Bersani, Peter Brooks, Judith Butler, Arnold Cooper, Esther da Costa Meyer, Frederick Crews, Hubert Damisch, Donald Davidson, David Forrest, John Forrester, Peter Gay, Kevis Goodman, Geoffrey Hartman, Mary Jacobus, Katherine Kearns, Dominick LaCapra, Jonathan Lear, Robert J. Lifton, Peter Lowenberg, Robert Michels, Juliet Mitchell, Toril Moi, Morton Reiser, Paul Robinson, Eric Santner, Kaja Silverman, Robert Shulman, Elsie Snyder, Meredith Skura, Richard Wollheim, and Slavoj Zizek. Panels: Psychoanalysis and Its Discontents; Psychoanalysis: Between Therapy and Hermeneutics?; Psychoanalysis and Sexual Identity; Psychoanalysis and the Historiography of Modern Culture; Psychoanalysis and Theories of Mind; Psychoanalysis: What Kind of Truth? The conference is free and open to the public. Whitney Humanities Center, 53 Wall Street, New Haven, CT 06520; 203-432-0670.

New Haven, CT; April 3–4, 1998

TRANSLATING KNOWLEDGE

The Sokal hoax, controversies over the Smithsonian's Hiroshima and Freud exhibitions, media frenzy over cloning, the heated debate over using the film *Amistad* to teach history—these recent events all point to the difficulties academic knowledge encounters when it goes public. But rather than simply bewailing the stupidity of journalists and audiences, denouncing "public intellectuals" for betraying their vocation, or turning our backs on the non-academic world, we need to come to grips with what happens to facts, concepts, and experiences developed in academic settings when they are exported into the mass media. How does the reframing of specialized knowledge for general audiences change its meaning? And what strategies might help scholars collaborate more effectively with media producers? The University of Chicago's Master of Arts Program in the Humanities invites the public to hear Ric Burns, George Chauncey, Susan Douglas, Tom Gunning, Bruno Latour, W.J.T. Mitchell, Paul Sereno, Lawrence Rothfield, Barbara Stafford, and Paul Young discuss the history, theory, and practice of documenting the humanities. For more information, call 773-834-1203, or visit <http://humanities.uchicago.edu/humanities/maph/index.html>

Chicago, IL; May 1–2, 1998

CLASSIC JOYCE

Announcing the XVI International James Joyce Symposium, "Classic Joyce." Topics for consideration might include the following: Joyce and the Classical Age; Classical Modernism; Classic Joyce/Classic Coke; Joycean Classics; Class in Joyce, Joyce in Class. Please contact the academic program coordinators, Cheryl Herr (University of Iowa) or R. Brandon Kershner (University of Florida), with paper titles and panel proposals as soon as possible: Cheryl Herr, phone 319-335-3219, fax 319-335-2535, e-mail <cheryl-herr@uiowa.edu>; R. Brandon Kershner, phone 352-392-6650, ext. 255, fax 352-392-0860, e-mail <rbkersh@nervm.nerdc.ufl.edu>. The following Italian agency will assist with registration and lodging: Patrizia De Guilmi, phone: (011) (39) 6 488-2433; fax: (011) (39) 6 488-0862; e-mail <joyce@uniroma3.it>. Visit the Classic Joyce Web site for updated information on schedules, panels, and events: <http://www.ucet.ufl.edu/~heiden/rome>.

Rome, Italy; June 14–20, 1998

TEACHING IN THE HUMANITIES

[illegible] humanities, such as the Core Curriculum [illegible] Rhodes College, are the subject of this [illegible] administrators, which will be held on the [illegible] already have such courses or that are con- [illegible] scholarly papers about the pro- [illegible] Rhodes, and several other institutions will [illegible] consider issues such as faculty recruitment [illegible] teaching, the character of such courses at [illegible] institutions, and the place of new forms of educational technology. [illegible] participants are welcome. Keynote speaker Martha [illegible] will participate in all sessions of the conference. For more [illegible] Prof. Michael [illegible] <[illegible]@rhodes.edu>.

Memphis, TN; November 19–21, 1998

WWW AND CULTURAL THEORY

The Center for the Humanities at Drake University announces "[illegible] W and Contemporary Cultural Theory: Magic, Metaphor and Power." This conference will bring together scholars from across the humanities and social sciences who will explore aspects of the Web in terms of contemporary cultural theory. In general, we will explore the Web as a site characterized by a nexus of complex economic, political, social, and aesthetic forces. Specifically, participants will engage the thematic issues of the Web as a space where metaphor, magic, and power converge. Participants include: Steven Jones, Stuart Moulthrop, Anne Balsamo, Rob Shields, Jody Berland, Sean Cubitt, Cynthia Fuchs, Robert Niedeffer and Benjamin Bratton, Theresa Senft, Vincent Mosco, John Sloop, Nancy Kaplan, Robert McChesney, Andrew Herman, and Thomas Swiss. Registration is $40, and is open to the public. Visit <http://www.multimedia.drake.edu/webconference/index.html>, or contact Nancy Smith, Howard Hall, Drake University, Des Moines, IA 50311. *Ph:* 515-271-4615; e-mail <nancy.smith@drake.edu>

Des Moines, IA; November 6–7, 1998

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Hypotheses

WHAT'S SO FUNNY?

Making Sense of Humor

ISAAC NEWTON IS REPORTED to have laughed precisely once in his life—when a friend asked him what use he saw in Euclid's *Elements*. Joseph Stalin, too, seems to have been somewhat agelastic. "Seldom did anyone see Stalin laugh," Marshal Zhukov reports in his reminiscences. "When he did, it was more like a chuckle." Other famous agelasts include William Gladstone and Ruth Bader Ginsburg. Did Jesus laugh? That was a core question of Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose*. Because I was unable to finish the novel, I'm not sure what the answer is; in any event, I do not recall many guffaws in the Gospels. ("The total absence of humour from the Bible," Alfred North Whitehead once observed, "is one of the most singular things in all literature.")

Rabelais declared, "Man is the laughing animal." Are we to infer, then, that Newton, Stalin, and the rest were somehow inhuman? Not necessarily. Rabelais was only echoing Aristotle, who in his *Parts of Animals* asserted not that all humans are laughers, but that "all laughers are humans." Some have contested even the latter claim. Thomas Mann and Isak Dinesen, for example, both insisted that their pet pooches were capable of a kind of inward laughter (though this would be hard to verify). What is certain is that purely spiritual entities—angels, gods—have no place on the laugher curve. That is because, whatever else it is, laughter is *physical*. You need to have a body to do it.

It is the sheer physicality of laughter that has made it so mysterious to philosophers and scientists. "Those who know why the kind of joy that kindles laughter should draw the zygomatic muscles back toward the ears are very knowing indeed," Voltaire wrote. Actually, the laughter reflex involves the contraction of some fifteen facial muscles, along with the simultaneous stimulation of the muscles of inspiration and those of expiration. Oddly, all these contortions prove very healthy for *homo ridens*: Robust laughter triples the amount of oxygen in the blood, reduces stress hormones, and bolsters the immune system by heightening T-cell activity.

To understand the nature of laughter, theorists have traditionally looked not to its effects but to its causes: the comic, the risible, the humorous. The easiest way to define the humorous is as that which elicits laughter. This, however, makes "humor causes laughter" a barren tautology. The proposition becomes useful only when humor is characterized independently of laughter.

There are three moldy old theories that purport to do this. The superiority theory—propounded in various forms by Plato, Hobbes, and Bergson—locates the essence of humor in the "sudden glory" (Hobbes) we feel when, say, we see Bill Gates smashed in the face with a custard pie. The incongruity theory—held by Pascal, Kant, and Schopenhauer—says that humor arises when the seemly and logical abruptly dissolves into the low and absurd. "Do you believe in clubs for small children?" W.C. Fields is asked. "Only when kindness fails," he replies.

These theories do not address, however, why feelings of superiority or incongruity should call forth a bout of cackling and chest heaving. An advantage of the relief theory—proposed by Freud—is that it at least tries to explain the causal link between humor and laughter. In this view, the laughable (ideally, a naughty joke) liberates the laugher from inhibitions about forbidden thoughts and feelings. The result is a discharge of nervous energy that distracts the inner censor from what is going on.

If none of these theories has ever been tested experimentally, the reason is simple: It is impossible to produce laughter under laboratory conditions. It is not, however, difficult to go out into the world and see what makes people laugh. Yet for all the centuries of speculation about laughter, no one had bothered to do this until Robert Provine came along. A psychologist who teaches at the University of Maryland's Baltimore County campus, Provine sent assistants to college campuses and shopping malls to eavesdrop on conversations and see what triggered volleys of laughter.

The results were dispiriting. The domain of the risible turned out to consist largely of such howlers as "Got to go now!," "What's that supposed to mean?," and "It must be nice." Only 10 percent of the laugh lines could be rated humorous even by the most charitable standards ("You don't have to drink—just buy us drinks"). These findings, along with the well-known contagiousness of laughter (which in its extreme form has caused epidemics of hysterical giggling among convent girls in Africa), have led evolutionary psychologists like MIT's Steven Pinker to conjecture that the primary Darwinian function of laughter is to serve as a social glue.

Could there really be a common denominator to a phenomenon that encompasses so many varieties? Diabolical laughter, laughter as a joyous awareness of our finitude, as an escape from gravity into levity, as a tool of mockery.

Perhaps the most delightful form of laughter, for the crafty don at least, is the *risus sophisticus*. According to the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, this is an ancient rhetorical counterploy identified by Gorgias of Leontini as "destroying one's adversaries' seriousness by laughter and their laughter by seriousness." Such tricks are "characteristically employed," the *Companion* adds, "by an aged philosopher commenting upon a paper of unfollowable complexity by a young postdoctoral Fellow."

JIM HOLT

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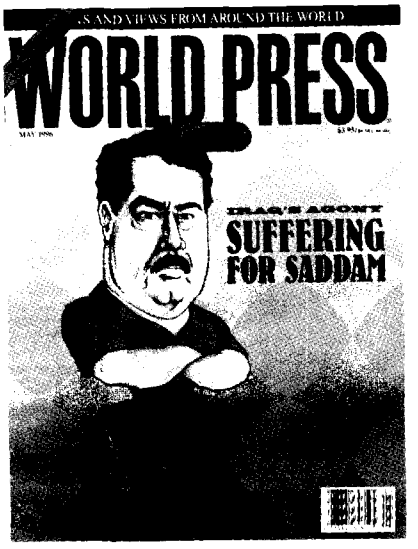

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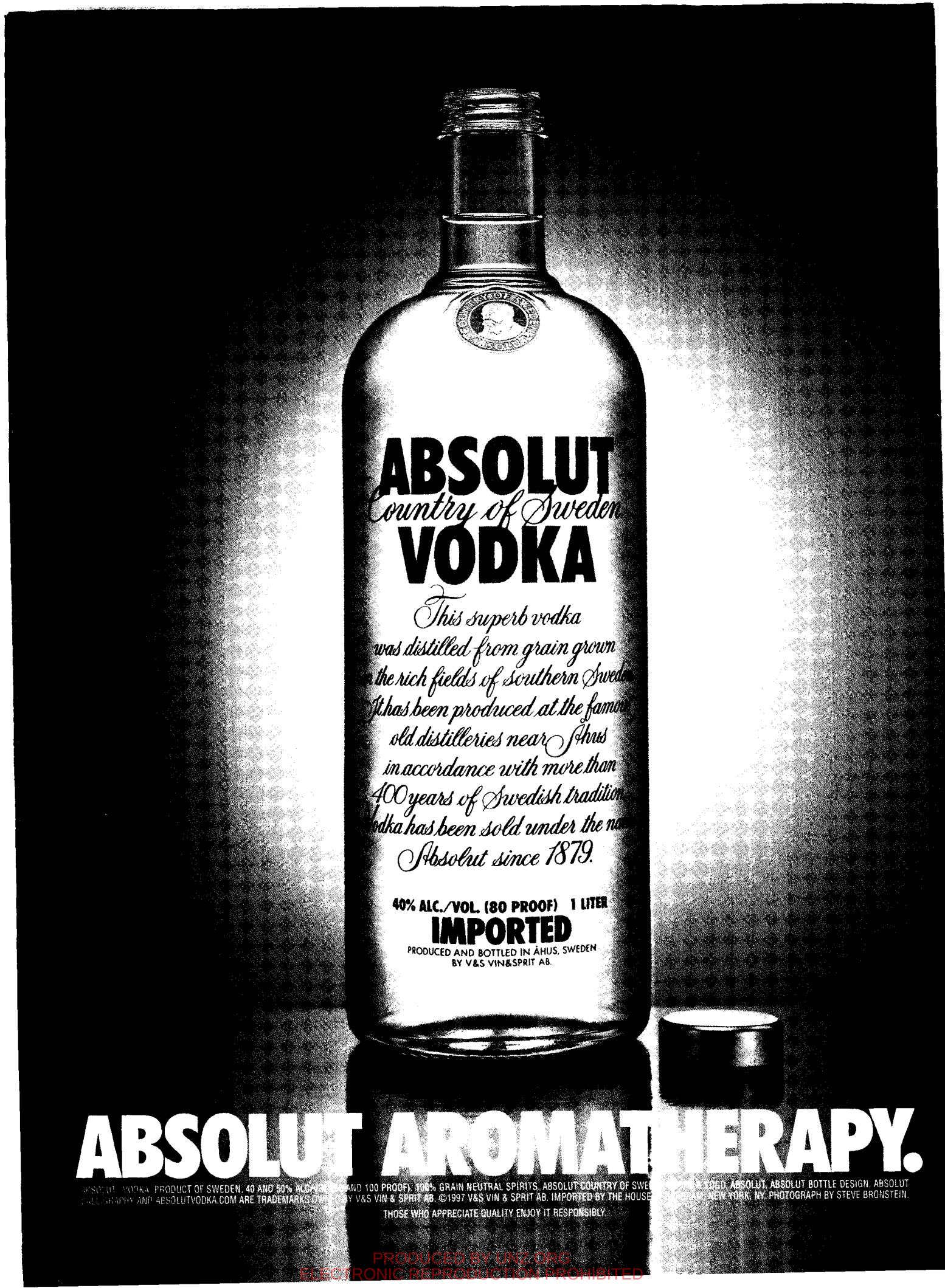
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